



# Energy Best Deal

## Evaluation Report, 2011

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# Summary of key findings

The Energy Best Deal programme seeks to inform domestic energy consumers about how they could reduce their energy costs by changing tariff and supplier, as well as providing energy efficiency advice. Run by Citizens Advice, the programme offers domestic energy consumers and frontline advice workers (both paid workers and volunteers) throughout England and Wales the opportunity to attend an information session on getting a better deal on their energy bills.

This report describes the results of an evaluation of the 2011<sup>1</sup> programme based on data from questionnaires completed immediately following the session, and follow-up telephone interviews carried out an average of two months after the session, and of the ongoing effectiveness of the 2010 programme, based on telephone interviews with eight consumers and ten frontline advice workers who attended sessions in 2010.

339 sessions were delivered by 114 delivery partners across the 14 regions of the Citizens Advice Financial Capability Forums<sup>2</sup> in England and Wales, and reached 2,002 consumers and 1,742 frontline advice workers. The programme will have an ongoing impact through the consumer advice work of the frontline advice workers.

## Impact of the 2011 programme – consumers

- In total, 2,002 consumers attended the Energy Best Deal sessions.
- Questionnaire responses were received from 1,133 consumers, approximately 57% of all consumers who attended sessions.
- Almost all (97%) consumers said they found the session useful. 63% found information about how to switch supplier useful, 49% found information about energy efficiency and heating grants useful, 48% found information about different ways of paying for energy useful, and 39% found information about debt and money management useful.
- 80% of people said they would probably or definitely do something as a result of the session. 50% said they would contact their current energy supplier, 40% said they would look at other energy suppliers' prices, and 38% said they would tell friends and family what they had learnt.
- Consumers who were disabled or on long-term sick leave were most likely to find their fuel bills a strain.
- Eighty consumers who completed questionnaires were contacted by telephone for a follow-up interview.
- Twenty-three of the eighty interviewees (29%) had taken action to get a better deal on energy costs since the session. The most popular action was looking at a switching website (12 people), followed by contacting the existing supplier (eight people).

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<sup>1</sup> Sessions are delivered between January and May, and so delivery of the sessions is completed by the middle of the year.

<sup>2</sup> The Financial Capability Forums are open to all organisations in a region with an interest in financial education. They meet quarterly and provide a way for member organisations to share experiences and resources and to develop new partnerships.

- Eighteen people found it easy to work out if they would save money by switching, but four people found it difficult. Ten people went on to switch, while 12 people found it was not worth switching.
- The interviewees who took action to seek a better deal on energy costs following the session were more likely to have internet access compared to the ones who did not take action.
- Thirty consumer interviewees (38%) had taken some kind of action to reduce their home energy use since the session. This reflects the increased attention on providing energy efficiency information in the 2011 programme.
- Forty-eight interviewees (60%) had taken at least one action, (either looking for a better deal on their energy costs or improving their energy efficiency), since the session.
- Forty-nine interviewees (61%) had passed on information from the session to friends and family, telling an average of 2.8 people each.
- A general feeling among interviewees was that, even if they hadn't put what they had learnt into practice to date, they felt better informed and more confident that they would be able to cope well in dealings with their energy supplier.

### **Impact of the 2011 programme - frontline advice workers**

- In total, 1,742 frontline advice workers attended Energy Best Deal sessions.
- Questionnaire responses were received from 1,042 frontline advice workers, 60% of all frontline advice workers who attended sessions.
- Following the session, 93% of frontline advice workers said they felt more confident advising on at least one of the topics covered in the presentation, and 29% felt more confident about all topics.
- Over half the frontline advice workers surveyed reported that they now felt more confident about advising on Warm Front or the Home Energy efficiency Scheme.
- Sixty-eight percent of frontline advice workers said they would definitely pass information on to colleagues.
- Twenty of the frontline advice workers who had completed questionnaires were contacted for a telephone interview.
- Five of 20 interviewees (25%) had looked into getting a better deal on their own energy following the session.
- Of the 20 advisors interviewed, 13 had given advice on the topics covered in the presentation since the session. Nine advisors (45%) had given advice on topics they had not previously advised on.
- Across all 20 interviewees, information from Energy Best Deal had, within the average two months since the session, been passed on to an average of 8.7 clients per frontline advice worker since the session. The median was 3 per frontline worker. Using the more conservative median and extrapolating this to all frontline advice workers who attended sessions, this gives a total potential of over 5,200 clients reached in the two months since the session.

## **Impact of the 2011 programme – Energy Best Deal Online**

Short videos were created as part of the programme for the first time. These were placed on several websites and between 6<sup>th</sup> April and 31<sup>st</sup> August<sup>3</sup>, with very little marketing, they were viewed over 8,600 times.

## **Ongoing impact of the 2010 programme**

- Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with eight consumers and ten frontline advice workers who attended Energy Best Deal sessions in 2010.
- Most of those consumers who had not taken action following the 2010 session had not taken any action in the following year either, while those who had taken action following the 2010 session had checked prices again in the following year.
- The ongoing effect of Energy Best Deal on frontline advice workers was much more pronounced than the effect on consumers, with the frontline advice workers generally continuing to use information from Energy Best Deal to help their clients.
- Seven of ten frontline advice workers said they would like to attend refresher sessions on Energy Best Deal topics.

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<sup>3</sup> The online videos were launched in April (English version) and August (Welsh version).

# The Energy Best Deal programme

This report describes the results of an evaluation of the delivery of the Energy Best Deal programme (EBD) in 2011. The programme, run by Citizens Advice and funded by EDF Energy and E.ON, sought to inform domestic energy consumers about how they could reduce their energy costs by changing tariff and supplier, as well as providing energy efficiency advice. It also sought to raise awareness about the help that is available from both suppliers and government for those who are struggling to pay their energy bills, and about the help and advice that is available on benefits and tax credits and for those in debt. The programme was piloted in 2008 with Ofgem and rolled out across England and Wales in 2009 and 2010; 2011 is therefore the third year that the programme has been run across England and Wales. The independent evaluation was conducted by the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) and funded by Ofgem, who have continued to be closely involved with the programme.

The Energy Best Deal programme, which in 2011 ran from January to May, offered energy consumers and frontline advice workers (both paid workers and volunteers) the opportunity to attend a presentation about getting the best deal for their energy supply. The sessions were delivered by staff from delivery partner organisations, who had been trained as 'Energy Health Check Champions' and provided with a toolkit developed by Ofgem which included a PowerPoint presentation, leaflets and facilitator notes. Delivery partners included Citizens Advice Bureaux, housing associations and credit unions.

339 sessions were delivered by 114 delivery partners across the 14 regions of the Citizens Advice Financial Capability Forums<sup>4</sup> in England and Wales, and reached 2,002 consumers and 1,742 frontline advice workers. This compares with 2,249 consumers and 1,361 frontline advice workers reached in the 2010 programme; in total, the 2011 programme reached 134 more people than the 2010 programme, despite having 25% less funding. The programme will have an ongoing impact through the consumer advice work of the frontline advice workers.

## Methods

The Energy Best Deal 2011 programme was evaluated using the following methods:

- A survey of consumers who attended the sessions, conducted at the end of each event using a self-completion questionnaire distributed by the delivery partner organisation. Survey data was collated in a spreadsheet by each delivery partner. The number of valid responses was 1,133 (57% of all consumers who attended the sessions).
- A survey of frontline advice workers who attended the sessions, conducted at the end of each event using a self-completion questionnaire distributed by the delivery partner organisation. Data from the completed survey was collated in a spreadsheet by the delivery partner. The

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<sup>4</sup> The Financial Capability Forums are open to all organisations in a region with an interest in financial education. They meet quarterly and provide a way for member organisations to share experiences and resources and to develop new partnerships.

number of valid responses was 1,042 (60% of all frontline advice workers who attended the sessions).

- A telephone survey of consumers (n=80) and frontline advice workers (n=20), approximately two months after they had attended a session, using contact information provided on the self-completion questionnaires. The telephone interviews were carried out by staff at CSE.
- In both the consumer and frontline worker questionnaires, some respondents omitted answers for some questions, and so all the percentages given in this report are calculated as percentages of the total number of respondents who gave answers for the relevant questions.

The ongoing effect of the 2010 Energy Best Deal programme was also evaluated, using the following methods:

- Follow-up telephone interviews with eight consumers who attended the Energy Best Deal sessions in 2010, to find out if the sessions had an ongoing impact. All of these had previously been interviewed for last year's Energy Best Deal evaluation.
- Follow-up telephone interviews with ten frontline advice workers who attended the Energy Best Deal sessions in 2010. Five of these had previously been interviewed for the 2010 evaluation while five had not.
- A set of three case studies obtained from frontline advice workers who had attended sessions in 2010.
- As these interviews cover a very small proportion of the total number of consumers and frontline advice workers who attended 2010 EBD sessions, they should not be interpreted as representative of all 2010 attendees, but are rather an exploration of the experience of some attendees.

The questionnaires and interview questions were designed by CSE with input from Citizens Advice and Ofgem.

Analysis of the 2011 questionnaires and interviews was undertaken using the statistical analysis software package SPSS. In order to assist statistical analysis, the questionnaires and interview schedules consisted mostly of pre-coded answers, with a limited number of open-ended questions. The interviews with 2010 participants included more open questions and were analysed qualitatively.

The main body of the report shows statistics from Energy Best Deal throughout England and Wales. Results for Wales alone are separated out in the appendix starting on page 36.

# Consumers: questionnaire responses

## Demographic information

A total of 1,133 consumer questionnaires were received and analysed. Basic demographic information collected gave the following profile of Energy Best Deal consumer attendees:

- 74% were female and 26% were male.
- 34% were retired, 27% were working, 23% were unemployed, 9% were disabled or long-term sick, 4% were carers and 4% were students.
- 56% lived in rented accommodation: 27% in housing association properties, 16% in council housing, and 13% in private rented accommodation.
- 68% of respondents had internet access. This was linked to age, with older age groups (60+) less likely to have internet access.
- 37% had switched supplier once in the past, while a further 19% had switched more than once.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 below illustrate age and tenure of respondents.

Figure 1: Age of respondents

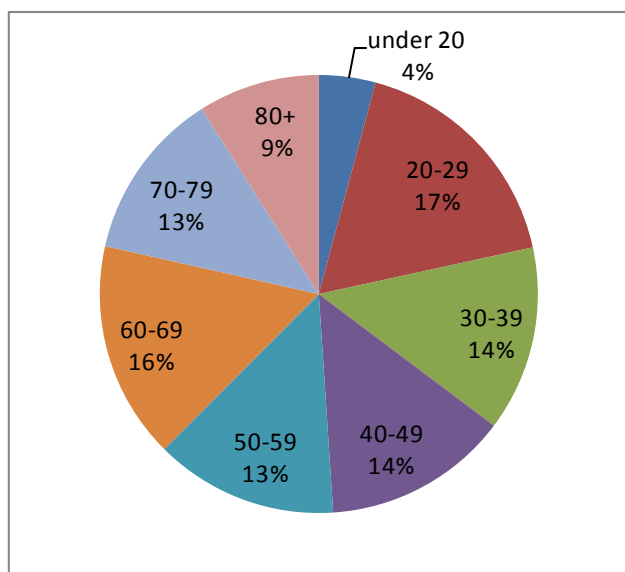
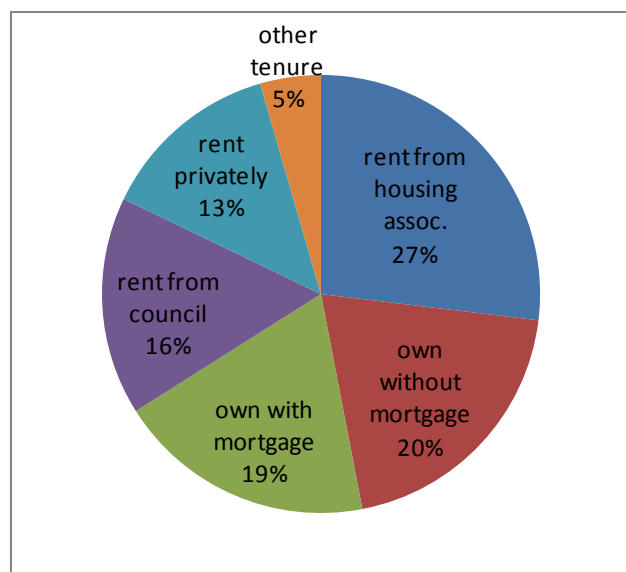


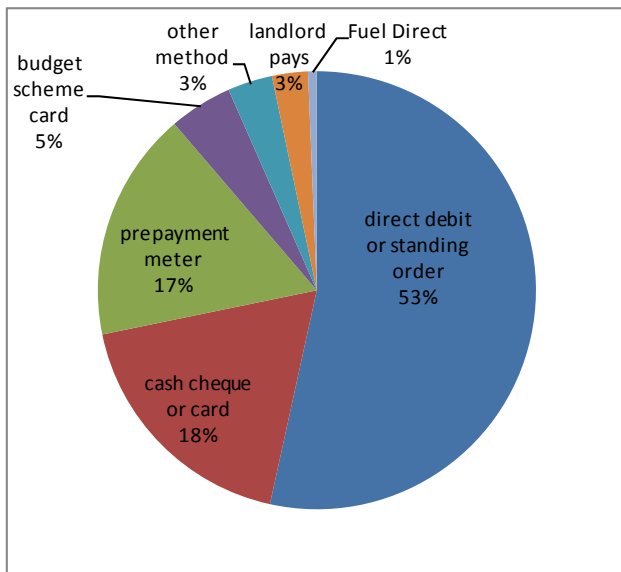
Figure 2: Tenure of respondents



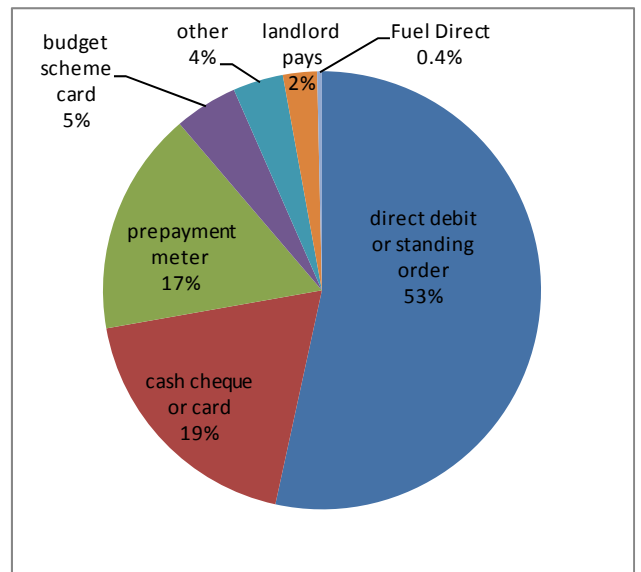
## Payment types and attitudes to bills

Figure 3 below illustrates the payment methods used by respondents for their electricity and gas usage. There was almost no difference between the two fuels in terms of the proportions of the respondents using each payment method.

**Figure 3: Payment method (electricity, n=1091)**



**Figure 4: Payment method (gas, n=835)**



Consumers were asked how they coped with their fuel bills in the winter. Figure 5 shows their responses; almost a third said they found their winter fuel bills to be a strain, while almost as many said they were not a problem. The most common answer was that bills were a worry but the consumer was able to manage.

**Figure 5: Attitudes to winter fuel bills**

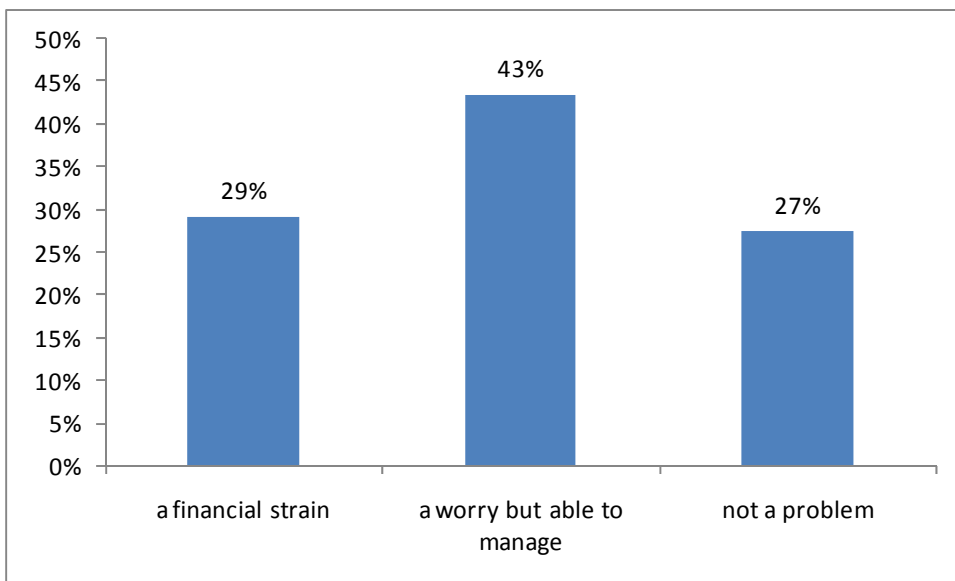
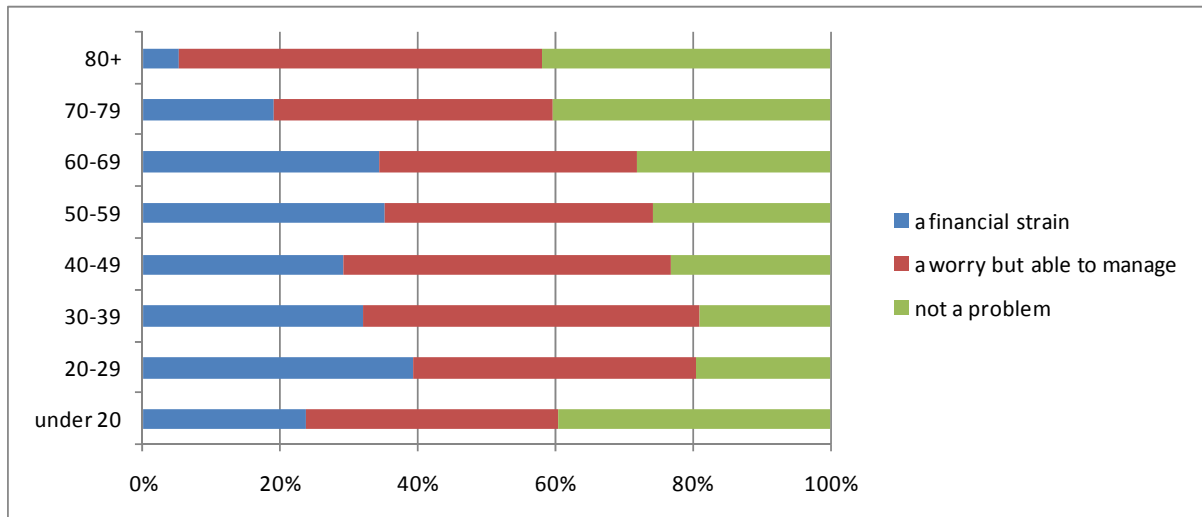


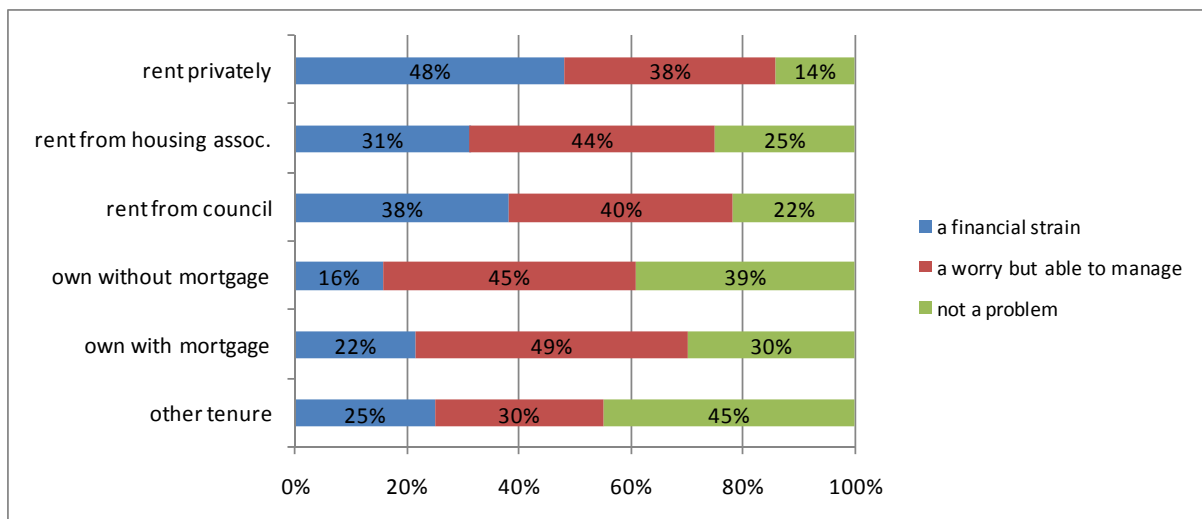
Figure 6 to Figure 8 break down attitude to winter bills by age, tenure and occupation. The results are shown only for people who answered the relevant questions. The under 20s and over 70s were the most likely to say that fuel bills are not a problem, while the age groups in between (20 to 69) were the ones most likely to find their bills to be a financial strain. Those who rent privately were most likely to find their bills a strain, followed by people who rent from the council. Those whose tenure type was 'other' were the most likely group to say that their bills were not a problem; this group could include people living with their parents or renting a room as a lodger. After this group, those who owned their home with no mortgage were most likely not to find their fuel bills to be a

problem. In terms of occupation, those who were disabled or on long-term sick leave were most likely to find their fuel bills a strain, followed by those who were unemployed. Retired people were the group most likely to say that they did not find their bills to be a problem. This group tends to be better targeted by suppliers and government to receive help paying their energy bills (such as priority with energy supplier funding for efficiency measures and winter fuel allowance from the government).

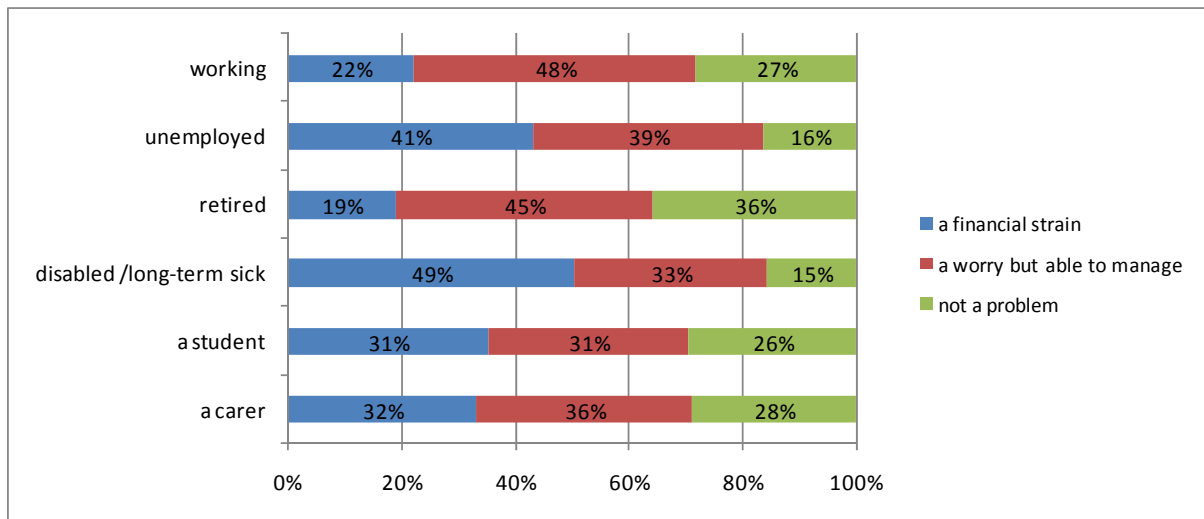
**Figure 6: Attitudes to winter bills by age**



**Figure 7: Attitudes to winter bills by tenure**



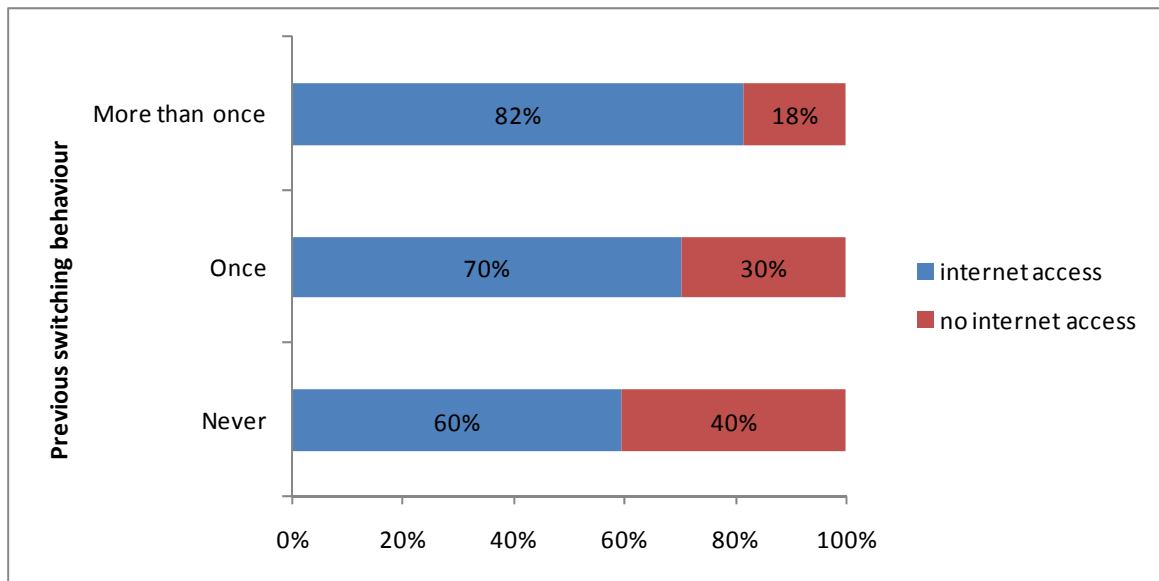
**Figure 8: Attitudes to winter bills by occupation**



### Experience and knowledge of switching prior to the session

Eighty-eight percent of consumers already knew that it was possible to switch energy supplier, almost exactly the same proportion as the consumers who attended the 2010 EBD sessions (87%). Thirty-seven percent of respondents had already switched supplier once in the past, while a further 19% had switched more than once. Two thirds of those who had switched in the past were proactive switchers, having switched of their own initiative to get a better deal (67%), while 33% of those who had switched were reactive switchers, switching in response to an approach from an energy supplier salesperson. Those switching as a result of an approach by an energy supplier salesperson may not have considered the full range of tariffs available to them before switching. Of those people who had switched in the past, the groups who rented from the council or rented privately contained a higher proportion of people who had switched after being approached by an energy supplier salesperson as opposed to looking for a better deal themselves. Sixty-four percent of respondents said they had never switched to a different tariff with the same supplier. Figure 9 illustrates that the groups who had switched once, or more than once in the past contained a higher proportion of people with internet access than the group that had never switched.

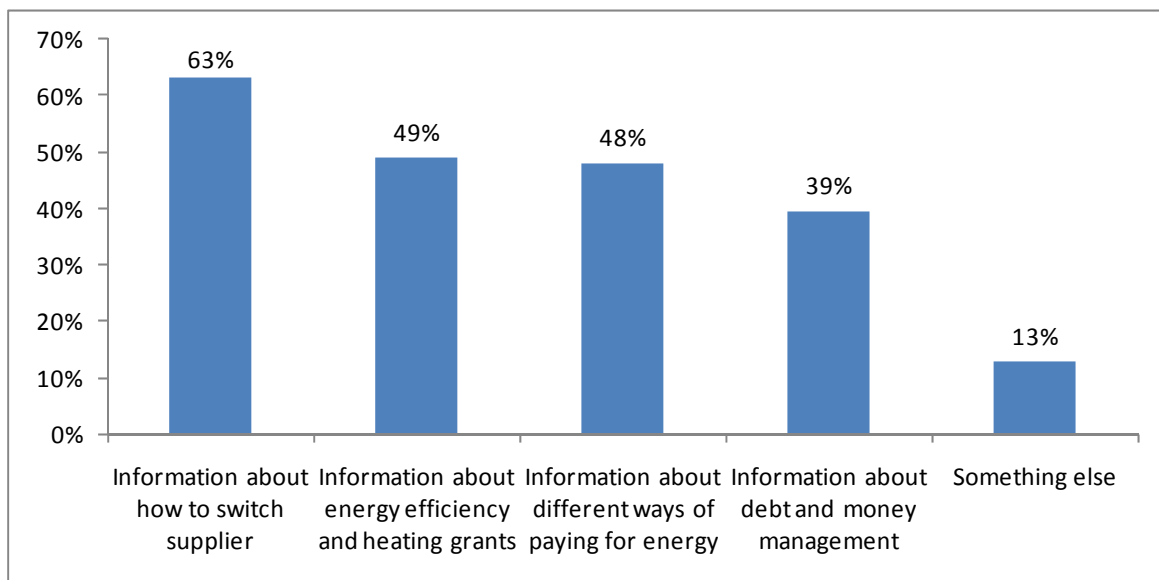
**Figure 9: Previous switching behaviour by internet access**



### The impact of the session

Ninety-seven percent of those who answered said they found the session useful (this question was left unanswered by 39 people, equal to 3% of respondents). Figure 10 shows what people said they found useful about the session.

**Figure 10: What did you find useful about the session?**



### Follow-up actions

Eighty percent of people said they would definitely or probably do something as a result of the session. Figure 11 illustrates this.

**Figure 11: Will you do anything as a result of the session today?**

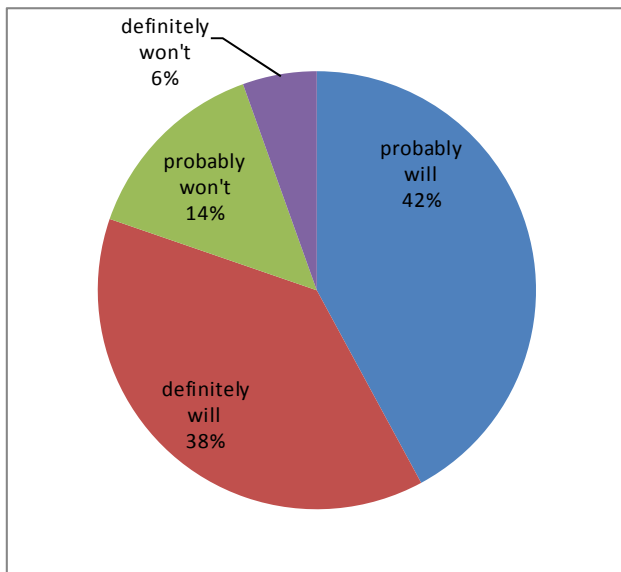
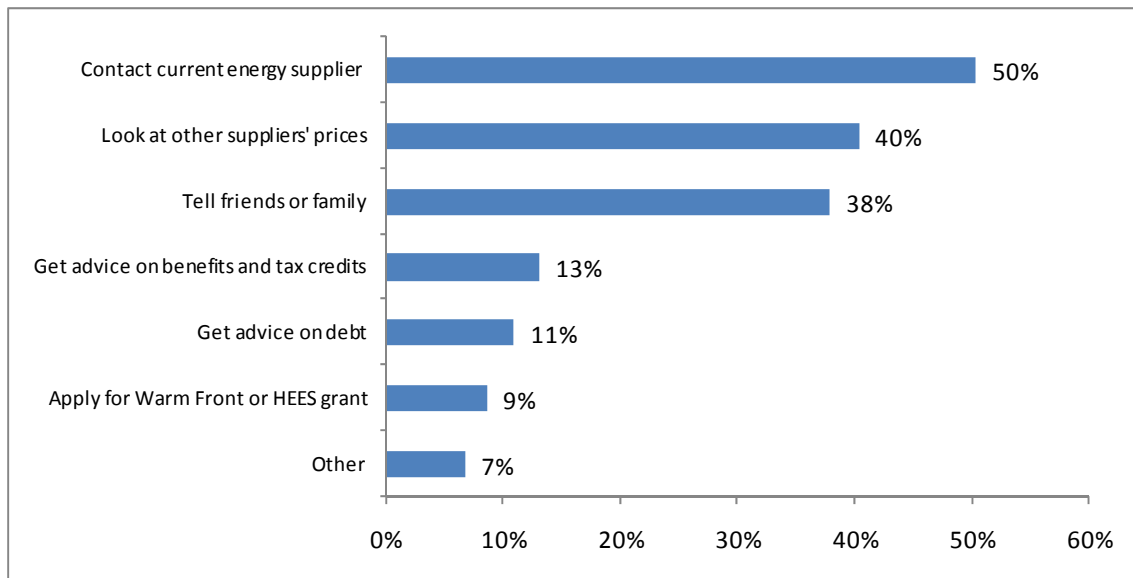


Figure 12 shows intended actions. The most popular intended action was contacting the current energy supplier, with half of respondents saying they would do this. The second most popular action was looking at other energy supplier's prices, followed by telling friends and family. Other actions were less popular, possibly because unlike the aforementioned actions, they would only be relevant to some consumers.

**Figure 12: Actions which consumers said they were likely to take following the session**



The most popular other action was investigating solar panels (7 people), something made possible by the new feed-in tariff<sup>5</sup>. Other actions mentioned were improving insulation (3 people), looking

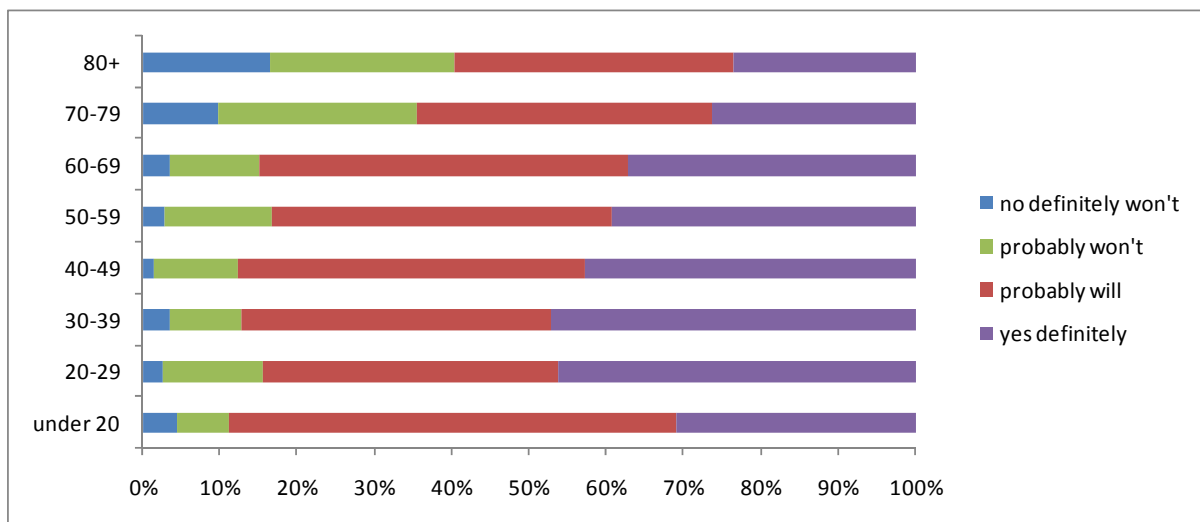
<sup>5</sup> The feed-in tariff is a payment that energy suppliers are required to make to homes and businesses for each kWh of electricity generated by small-scale on-site renewable energy technologies such as solar pv.

into social tariffs (3 people), saving water<sup>6</sup> (3 people) and asking to be put on their supplier’s priority services register (2 people).

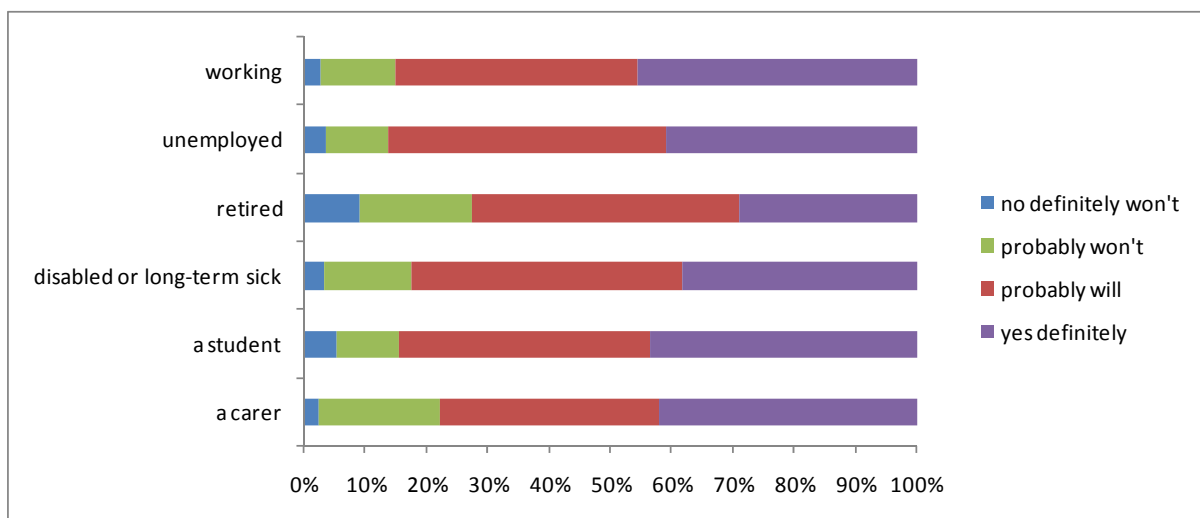
### Intention to act related to other attributes

Intention to act following the session was not influenced by whether or not people had switched in the past. The strongest pattern was between age and intention to act (Figure 13 and Figure 14), with people aged 70 and over being more likely to say they would not act. In terms of occupation, there was not much difference between the different occupations apart from the retired group, which was more likely say that they definitely or probably would **not** act following the session.

**Figure 13: Intention to act following the session, by age group**



**Figure 14: Intention to act following the session, by occupation**



<sup>6</sup> The reason for saving water was not specified by respondents. Presumably they meant that they would save energy by reducing their hot water consumption. Alternatively the Energy Best Deal session may have got them thinking about how they could save money on other utility bills. This was definitely the case for one person (who is not included here in the total for water saving actions), who said they would apply for a social tariff for water, so in this case the session had made them think about saving on other utility bills as well.

## Consumers: follow-up interviews

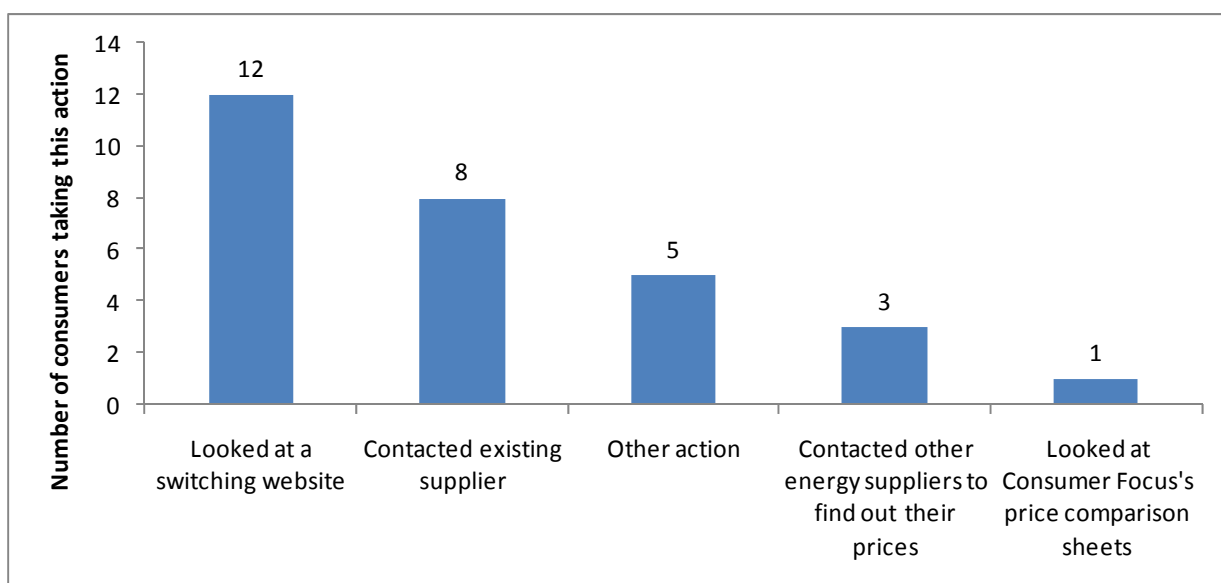
Eighty people who had attended the 2011 Energy Best Deal sessions and returned questionnaires with contact details were selected at random to be interviewed. In general they were interviewed around two months after attending their session. Five people who were contacted did not remember attending the session.

In this section numbers are given instead of (or as well as) percentages, as the sample size was less than 100.

### Action taken since the session

Twenty-three people (29%) had taken action since the session. Figure 15 shows the number of people taking specific actions.

Figure 15: Actions taken by consumer interviewees following their EBD session



'Other actions' taken were contacting the existing supplier in order to be put onto a social tariff, phoning a price comparison service, sending information to a price comparison service, and speaking to a salesperson who contacted the consumer in the weeks following the session.

### Calculating potential savings

Nine people found it 'very easy' to work out if they would save money by switching, while a further nine found it 'fairly easy'. Four people said they found it fairly difficult. One person did not know if she would save money by switching as she was awaiting a response from a price comparison service.

Ten people calculated that it would be worth switching supplier or tariff, and all of these had gone on to switch (at least one person switched to a different tariff with the same supplier). Twelve people found it was not worth switching, including all of the four people who found it difficult to calculate if they would save money. As mentioned above, one person did not know if it was worth switching because she was awaiting a response.

## The switching process

All of the people who had switched found the process fairly easy or very easy.

The people who had switched were asked if they found anything to be a problem while switching, and if they found anything helpful. Four people identified problems. These were:

- One person found that researching and understanding the information available took a long time.
- One person was stopped by the need to clear outstanding bills before moving.
- One person used a switching service which recommended switching to another provider. The new provider was cheaper overall; however, the new provider insisted on charging a higher amount in the winter and a lower amount in the summer, rather than spreading the cost throughout the year. The consumer is on a fixed income and can't absorb the higher winter cost. The consumer cannot change tariff again because there is a fee to leave the tariff before the end of the fixed period. The consumer saw this as a failure by the switching service.
- One person contacted their supplier but found that the customer service advisor did not know about social tariffs. If the consumer had not had information from the Energy Best Deal session, he would not have been able to press the energy supplier to move him to a social tariff. This is therefore a problem in the switching process that Energy Best Deal has been able to solve.

Three people identified things that they found helpful:

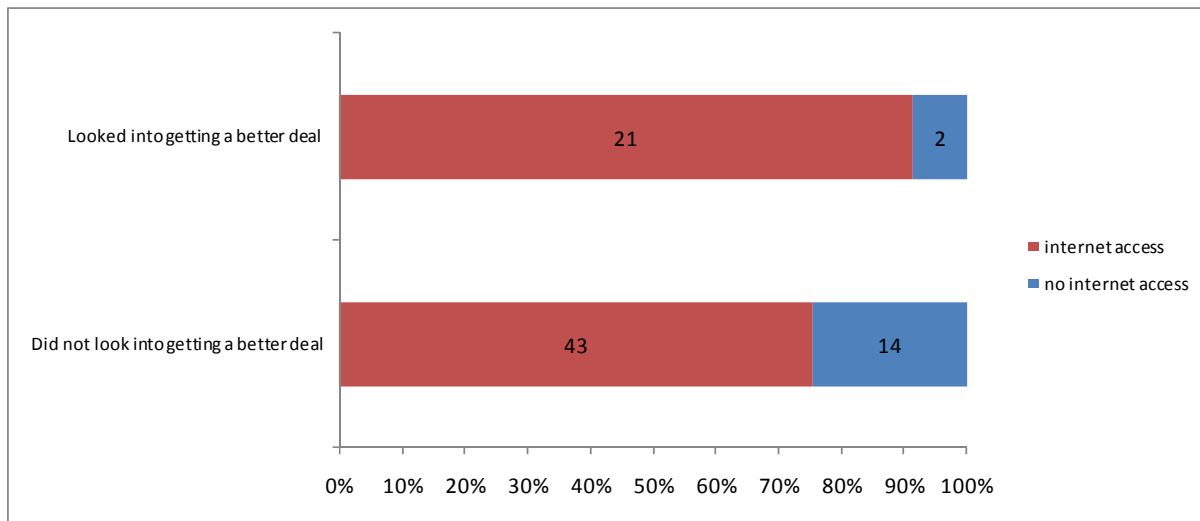
- A customer service advisor at the energy supplier was very helpful.
- A switching website was useful.
- A switching service's call-back system made it easier to check information.

Note that customer service advisors and switching websites feature in both the 'problems' category and the 'useful' category.

## The role of internet access in enabling action

Access to the internet appeared to be a factor in whether consumers looked into getting a better deal following the session. Figure 16 below shows that a higher proportion of the group that looked into getting a better deal had internet access, compared to the group that did not look into getting a better deal.

**Figure 16: Internet access and action following the session**



### **Switching payment method**

Six interviewees had switched payment method. Three of these had also switched supplier. Three of the people who had switched payment method had answered 'no' to the question 'have you looked for a better deal on your energy since the session?', which could indicate that they do not consider changing payment method to be looking for a better deal because it is not switching tariff or supplier, even though they saved money by changing payment method. All of those who switched payment method had moved to direct debit.

A common reason for not switching payment method was that prepayment meters were preferred for budgeting.

### **Issues with switching**

All consumers were asked if there was anything that put them off switching. These are summarised in Table 1.

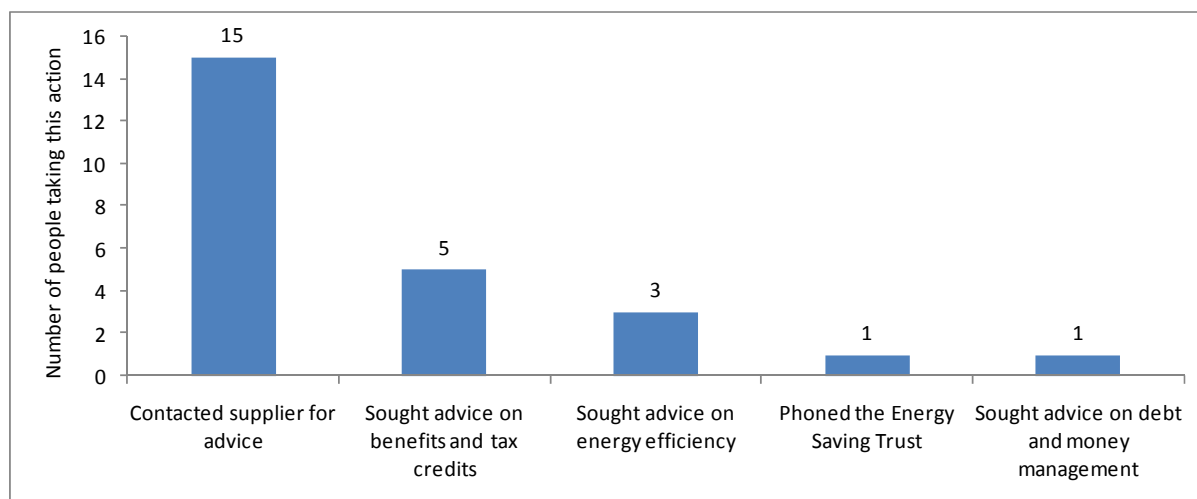
**Table 1: Responses to the question, ‘Was there anything that put you off switching?’**

Answer	Number of people	Percentage of all interviewees
Haven't had time	19	24%
Happy with current supplier and tariff	9	11%
Won't save any / much money	6	8%
Tied in to current tariff	5	6%
Bills included in rent	4	5%
Concerned about switching to a worse deal	4	5%
Switched shortly before session	4	5%
Think the price will only go up again	4	5%
Living with parents	3	4%
Too much hassle	3	4%
Don't want to lose social tariff	2	3%
Debt with current supplier	2	3%
Language barrier	2	3%
Husband deals with bills	1	1.3%
Don't trust energy suppliers	1	1.3%
Recently changed heating system and so don't know consumption	1	1.3%
Worried about something going wrong	1	1.3%

### Other actions

Interviewees were asked about other actions they had taken since the session. These are summarised in Figure 17 below. Fewer of these kinds of actions were taken by 2011 interviewees, compared with those interviewed in the evaluation of the 2010 EBD programme: for example, in 2010 15 people sought advice on benefits and tax credits, compared to 5 in 2011. Seventeen people sought advice on energy efficiency following the session in 2010, compared with three in 2011, reflecting the inclusion of more advice about energy efficiency in the presentation itself in 2011 which reduced the need to look for further information.

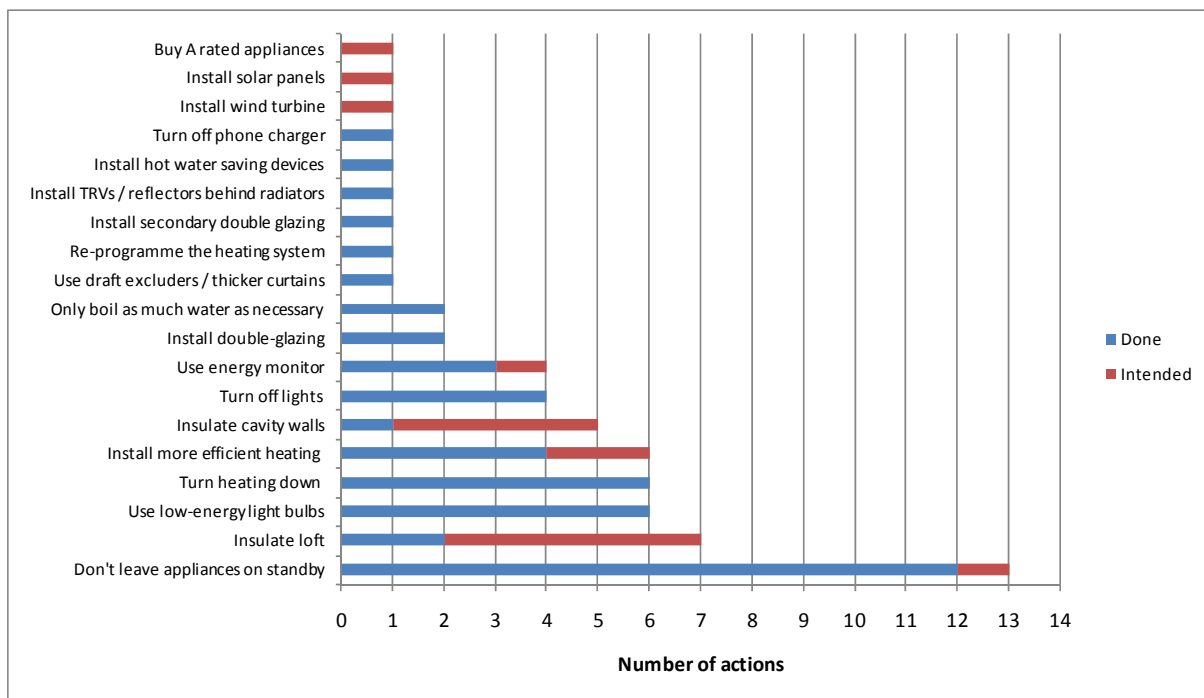
**Figure 17: Other actions taken by interviewees**



## Energy efficiency actions

The 2011 EBD programme included more information about energy efficiency than in previous years. Interviewees were asked if they had taken any actions to improve the energy efficiency of their homes since the session. Thirty interviewees had taken a total of 48 actions. A further 16 intended actions were also mentioned. Figure 18 shows the type and number of actions that were taken or intended.

**Figure 18: Energy efficiency actions: already done and intended**



Unsurprisingly, low- or no-cost actions were the most popular, although the big measures of cavity and loft insulation featured as well. Due to the longer timescale, for most people these were actions that were intended for the future rather than completed already.

Forty-nine people had passed on information from the session to friends and family. They were asked to estimate how many people they had told, resulting in a total of 222 people across all interviewees; an average of 2.8 people each.

## Other points

Taking into account all of the actions that interviewees were asked about, from looking for a better tariff through changing payment method to seeking advice on benefits and taking measures to improve energy efficiency, 48 of the 80 interviewees (60%) had done at least one thing since the session. Of the 32 people who had not done anything, eleven had told friends and family about what they had learnt at the session.

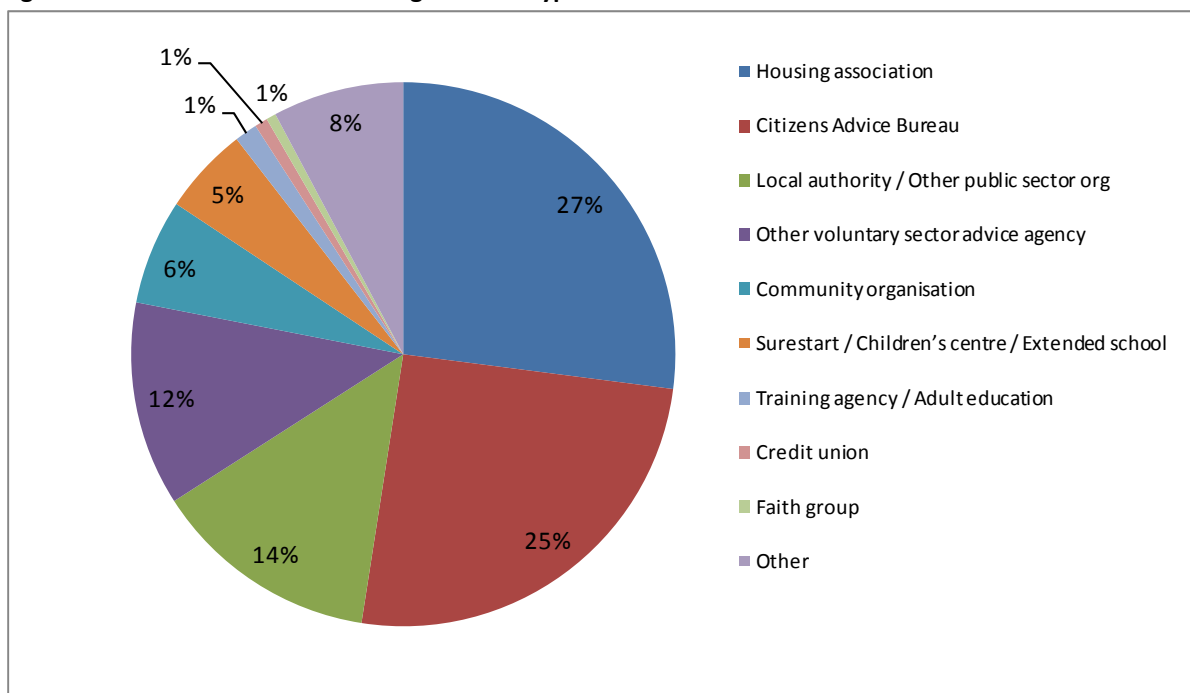
A general feeling among interviewees was that, even if they hadn't put what they had learnt into practice to date, they felt better informed and more confident that they would be able to cope well in future dealings with their energy supplier.

# Frontline advice workers: questionnaire responses

## Respondents and prior practice

Questionnaires were received from 1,042 frontline advice workers. Figure 19 shows the organisations represented by the frontline advice workers.

**Figure 19: Frontline advice worker organisation types**



The 'Other' category included representatives from Age UK, universities, and support groups for older people and migrant workers.

Ninety-seven percent already knew that it was possible to change energy supplier, while 92% knew that some payment methods were more expensive than others.

Frontline advice workers were asked what types of advice they had given prior to the session:

- 41% had advised on getting a better deal on gas and electricity
- 40% had advised on changing payment method
- 32% had advised on applying for a Warm Front or Home Energy Efficiency Scheme grant
- 62% had advised on benefits and tax credits
- 57% had advised on debt

Fifty-nine percent had experience of advising on specifically energy-related topics (the first three bullet points above). Twenty percent had not advised on any of the topics above before.

## The impact of the session

When asked whether they felt better informed about switching energy supplier and payment method, 57% answered 'to a great extent' and 41% answered 'to some extent'. Seventy-nine percent said they were more likely to look for a better deal on their own energy following the session.

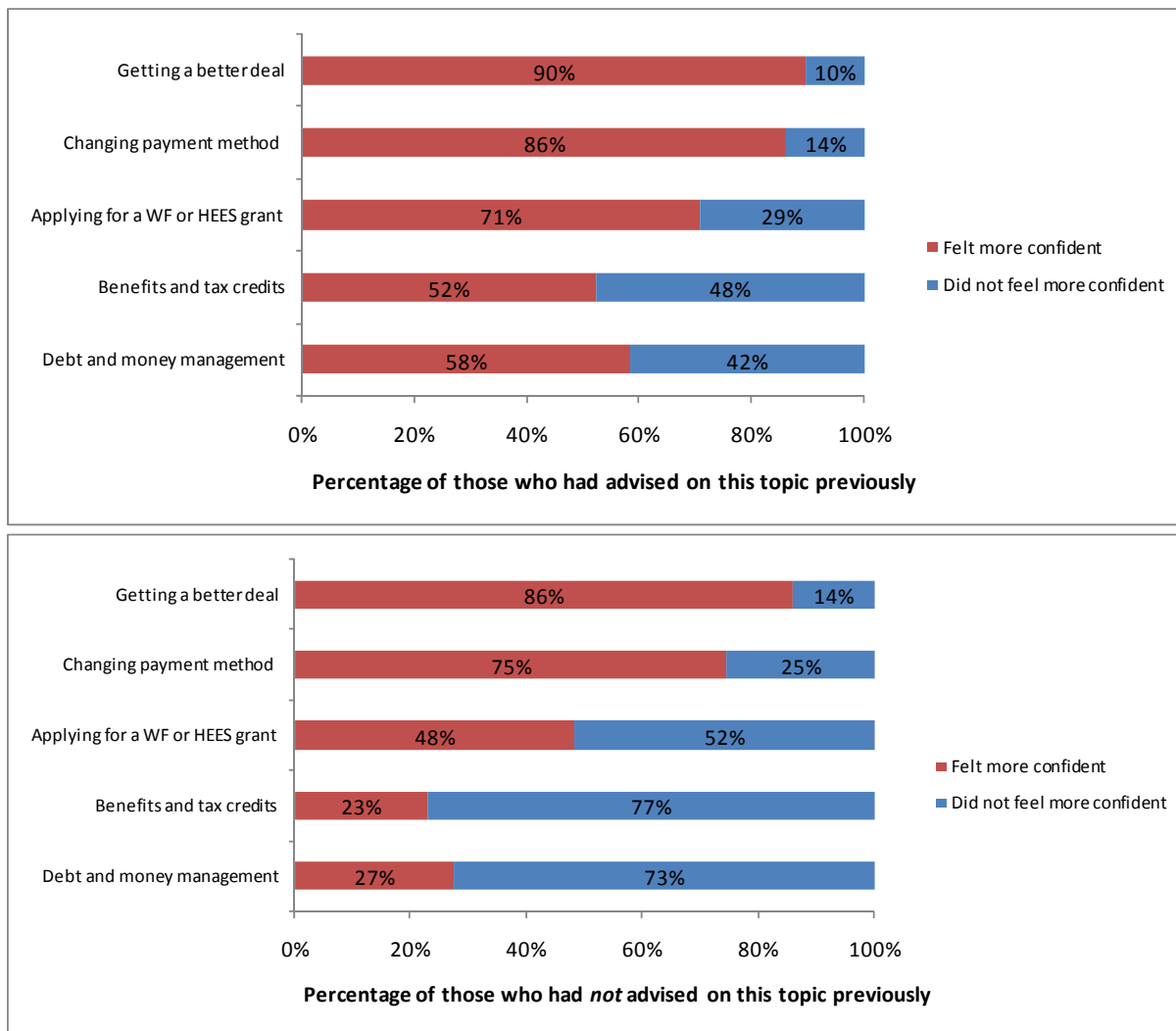
Frontline advice workers were asked if they felt more confident providing information on specific topics following the session:

- 87% felt more confident advising on getting a better deal on gas and electricity
- 79% felt more confident advising on changing payment method
- 55% felt more confident advising on applying for a Warm Front (WF) or Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) grant
- 41% felt more confident advising on benefits and tax credits
- 45% felt more confident advising on debt

Ninety-three percent said they felt more confident advising on at least one of these topics, while 29% felt more confident about all of these topics.

Figure 20 shows confidence in advising on topics following the session, split by whether or not the frontline advice worker had previously advised on each topic. Of those who had advised on a topic previously, the majority had gained confidence from the presentation, although there is a split between the specific energy-related topics, where large proportions had gained confidence, and the general financial topics of benefits and debt management, where a lower proportion (but still the majority) had gained in confidence. Of those who had *not* previously advised on a topic, the increase in confidence was slightly lower, but a similar pattern was visible in that confidence in advising on general financial topics had not increased as much as for the energy-related topics. This could be because the focus of the presentation is not on these topics, which are wide-ranging and complex.

**Figure 20: Increased confidence from advisors who had / had not advised on topics previously**



### Anticipated number of clients and colleagues to be informed

Frontline advice workers were asked how many clients they expected to advise on these topics over the course of the next six months. Some respondents planned to include an article in their housing association newsletter, which would reach all tenants, and so gave very large figures (the largest was 27,000 properties). Including these, the average per frontline advice worker was 55<sup>7</sup>. Excluding them, it was 23.

Frontline advice workers were also asked if they intended to pass on information to colleagues, and if so, how many. Sixty-eight percent said they would definitely pass on information, while 29% said they probably would (in addition some noted that all of their colleagues were at the session). The average estimated number of colleagues that information would be passed on to was just under 6; this probably includes some communication via newsletters rather than face-to-face because some respondents gave large numbers here (50+). The median was five colleagues each.

<sup>7</sup> Where respondents gave a range, the lowest of the range is counted. Some gave responses such as 'all my tenants' 'many' and 'lots', which could not be included in the total.

## Frontline advice workers: follow-up interviews

Follow-up interviews were carried out with 20 frontline advice workers, approximately two months after they attended the session. In this section absolute numbers rather than percentages are given, due to the small sample size.

### Frontline advice workers' own energy use

Since the session, five of the twenty interviewees (25%) had looked into getting a better deal on their energy. Actions taken were:

- Contacting existing supplier to ask for a better deal (2 people)
- Looking at a switching website (3 people)
- Looking at Consumer Focus's price comparison sheets (1 person)

Three interviewees found that it was 'very easy' to work out if they would save money, while a fourth found it 'fairly easy'. The fifth person who had looked into getting a better deal had not got as far as trying to work out whether they would save money. Three interviewees had gone on to switch. All of those who had switched found the switching process to be very easy.

When asked if anything had put them off looking into getting a better deal, nine people cited time as a factor, two people said they already checked for a good deal on a regular basis, two people said their husbands dealt with the energy bills, and two had just moved house and so were waiting to collect more consumption data before looking for the best tariff.

Six interviewees had taken steps to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. Actions taken were:

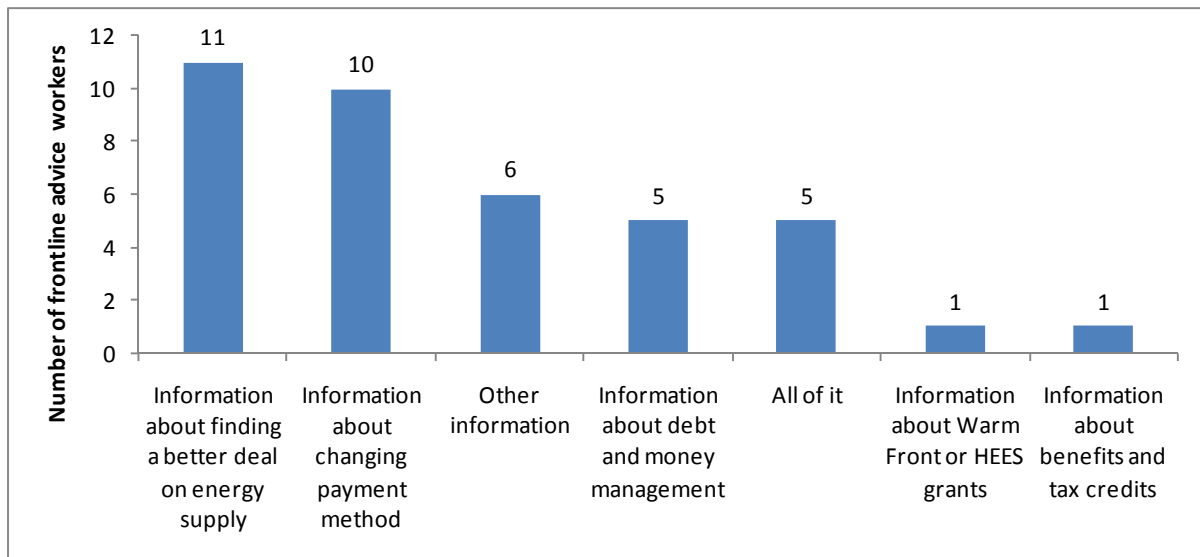
- Making sure appliances are not left on standby (3 people)
- Turning the heating down (2 people)
- Installing low energy light bulbs (1 person)
- Reprogramming the heating system (1 person)
- Turning lights off (1 person)
- Installing an energy monitor (1 person)
- Enquiring about grants (1 person)

Further actions were planned, including installing loft insulation (3 people), installing cavity wall insulation (2 people), and getting an energy monitor (1 person).

### Usefulness of the session and advice given since the session

All interviewees found the session useful. Figure 21 shows what interviewees found most useful.

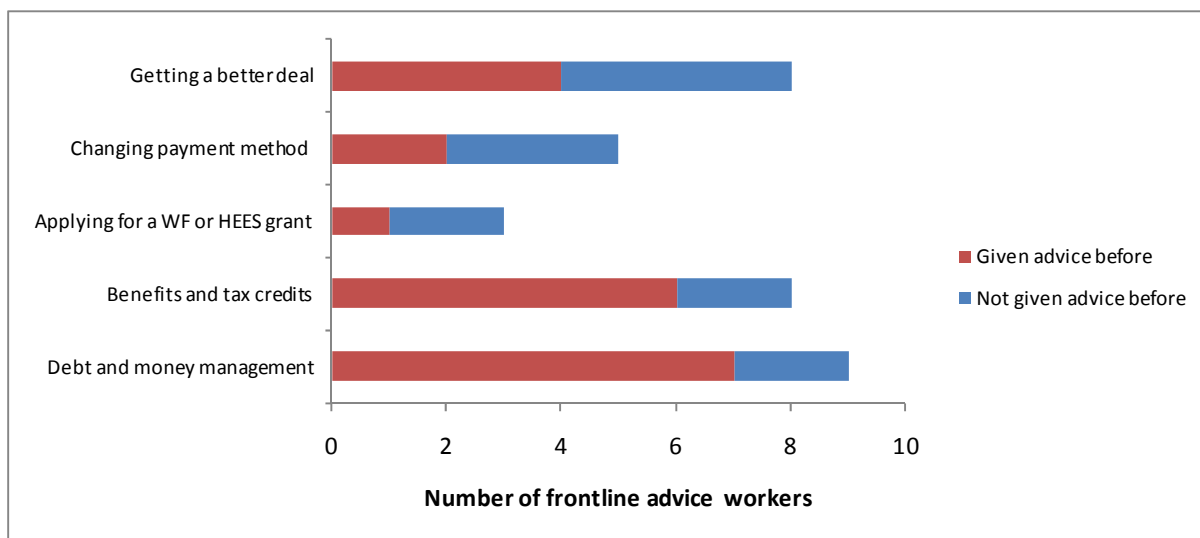
**Figure 21: Information found useful by frontline advice workers**



Other information that interviewees found useful included information about annual statements of energy consumption, budgeting information, contact details, energy efficiency, and social tariffs.

Since the session, 13 people (65%) had given advice to clients on at least one of the topics covered in the presentation. Figure 22 compares advice-giving before and after the session. The number of people giving advice on getting a better deal had doubled (although it should be noted that this is a small sample; the figure increased from 4 to 8). Nine advisors (45%) were giving advice on topics they had not previously advised on.

**Figure 22: Advice-giving before and after the Energy Best Deal session**



### Numbers of clients and colleagues reached

Frontline advice workers were asked to estimate how many people they had advised on these topics since the presentation. Three people had not advised on any of these topics, while others had passed information on to clients in numbers ranging from one to more than 60. Averaged over the group of 20 interviewees, information on these topics was being passed on to an average of 8.7

clients per frontline advice worker and a median of 3. This is the number who have received information in the average two months following the session; over time, this figure is therefore likely to increase. Using the median to extrapolate to all frontline advice workers who attended sessions, this gives a total potential of more than 5,200 clients reached in the two months since the session.

Interviewees were also asked how many colleagues they had passed information on to. Twelve had not passed on information; two of these said it was because all of their colleagues were at the training. The others had passed information on to an estimated total of 34 people; an average of 1.7 colleagues per frontline advice worker.

### **Issues preventing clients getting a good deal on their energy**

Frontline advice workers were asked if they had come across any particular issues which were preventing their clients from getting a better deal on their energy. Responses included the following:

- Arrears with current supplier
- Preconceived ideas about what is possible, not knowing how easy it is to switch
- No access to internet or landlines (calls from mobiles expensive)
- No bank account
- Not having access to the gas network and so using expensive heating fuel
- Reluctance to switch
- Vulnerability to mis-selling, both through telesales and doorstep selling

## 2010 participant interviews – consumers

In addition to interviewing people who attended sessions in 2011, it was decided that the evaluation should include re-visiting people who attended sessions in 2010, to assess what ongoing impact attendance at the sessions had.

Consumers who attended 2010 sessions, and had been interviewed following those sessions, were selected at random and contacted. In total eight consumers were interviewed, 10% of the consumers who were interviewed for the 2010 Energy Best Deal evaluation a year ago. This is a small sample and so the results should not be treated as representative of the whole group of consumers who attended Energy Best Deal sessions in 2010. Rather, this is a qualitative exploration of the experiences of a small group of people a year after they attended the session.

The questions that consumers were asked depended on what their responses were in their last interview – for example, whether or not they had looked into getting a better energy deal.

Six interviewees had not previously looked for a better deal on their energy following the session. A year later, five of these had still not looked for a better deal. Two people said this was because they were happy with their current supplier, and one person spoke very little English and so found it very difficult to interact with the energy suppliers. One person said it was too much hassle and another person was concerned about getting worse customer service or more complicated bills.

The sixth person that had not looked into getting a better deal last time we spoke to him, had since looked into getting a better deal, but found that he would not save any money.

Two of the interviewees had previously looked into getting a better deal on their energy when they were interviewed in 2010, but had not switched. These two people had both checked prices again since the first interview; one had found that switching would be worthwhile, had done so and had found it easy, and the other found that it would not be worth switching.

None of the interviewees had switched payment type last time we interviewed them. Since then, only one person had considered changing payment method but had decided against it because he preferred having a prepayment meter for budgeting. Three of the other interviewees also said that they preferred to have a prepayment meter for the same reason.

In last year's interview, we asked if they had taken any other actions such as seeking advice on benefits and tax credits. For the second interview, we reminded them what actions they had taken and asked what the outcome of these actions had been. Two people sought advice on benefits and tax credits; one person found that the best information for him was available on the internet, while the other person had a benefits check, and although she found that she was already receiving everything she was entitled to, she said she had benefitted by having peace of mind knowing that she was receiving the correct benefits.

One interviewee sought advice from several sources including her supplier. She found that the customer service advisors were not very helpful because they used too much jargon and did not come to the point.

Another interviewee looked into getting a Warm Front grant and looked into insulation grants, but found he could not benefit from them because he is a leaseholder in a housing association flat.

Six interviewees had taken various actions to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, although this topic was not covered in as much detail in the 2010 presentation as the 2011 EBD programme. Actions taken were mostly basic ones such as turning off lights and making sure appliances weren't left on standby. One person had looked into getting cavity wall insulation but the survey had shown that his walls were not suitable.

One interviewee, who was struggling to pay her bills, spoke very little English and found it difficult to speak to her supplier or seek advice from other sources. She has found translators and interpreters to be of little help, probably because they are not available to help with phone calls to suppliers or advice providers. Although some Energy Best Deal sessions have been delivered in other languages where the capacity to do this exists, it seems that there is an issue because while the Energy Best Deal sessions give people the means to be more confident in dealing with energy suppliers and to know about sources of help, if a person cannot speak the language necessary then they cannot be confident in these dealings even when they know their rights. It might be useful for extra support to be offered to speakers of other languages as part of the EBD programme, or at least to signpost where there are services available for speakers of other languages. Energy suppliers do have customer services for speakers of other languages, but they are badly advertised. This would be useful information for Energy Best Deal to supply.

Three interviewees gave very positive feedback when asked for other comments at the end of the interview. Two people said that the other attendees at the session had a very positive reaction. One person mentioned that in his experience people at his housing association struggled because of lack of internet access and also lack of confidence that they can get through the switching process without help from another person.

## **2010 participant interviews – frontline advice workers**

Ten frontline advice workers who attended Energy Best Deal sessions in 2010 were interviewed in order to find out whether Energy Best Deal had an ongoing influence. Five of these had been interviewed already for the 2010 evaluation and for this second interview were selected at random from the twenty who were interviewed in 2010. The other five had *not* previously been interviewed, and were selected at random from the questionnaire responses from the 2010 evaluation. They were all asked a common set of questions, plus separate sets of questions depending on whether they had been previously interviewed or not. If they had previously been interviewed, the questions were tailored according to what their responses in their previous interview were. In this section the responses to the common set of questions will be reported first, followed by the responses from the frontline advice workers who had been interviewed in 2010, and then the ones who had *not* been interviewed in 2010.

Interviewees were selected at random from the group of 20 who had been interviewed in 2010.

## 2010 frontline advice worker participant interviews: common questions

This section covers ten frontline advice workers who attended Energy Best Deal sessions in 2010. Half of them had been interviewed in the 2010 evaluation, while the other half had not.

Interviewees were asked what they remembered most clearly from the Energy Best Deal session. The responses are summarised below:

- There are telephone-based switching services for people who don't have access to the internet
- You should check regularly to make sure you are on the best deal
- The information about social tariffs was the most memorable
- A significant amount of money can be saved by switching
- It is possible to switch with a prepayment meter, even if you have up to £200 of debt
- The debt management section was the most memorable
- It is important to keep an eye on the amount of energy you are using
- Fuel suppliers must supply a statement showing consumption and tariff clearly
- Information on how to reduce bills, including switching, social tariffs, and reducing energy consumption was the most memorable

When asked if there was anything in particular that was useful to them in their job, two people replied that it was all useful, six people said that information about how to get a better deal was useful, and three people said that information about debt, money management, benefits and tax credits was useful. One person said that she mainly worked with older people who would be confused by the switching process; she is the manager of a sheltered housing scheme at a housing association.

Eight people said that the session gave them more information to help with issues that they were already advising on, and that they have found they are continuing to use this information. One person said that it only helped her in knowing when it would be appropriate to signpost clients to another organisation, and one person said the information was not directly useful for her job but that she has shared it with the rest of her office, some of whom are continuing to use it.

Eight people said that the session had helped them to advise on issues they had *not* previously been advising on, and one person said that although it did not help with advising on issues she had not previously advised on, it was useful to have the information collected together in one place in the EBD materials. As mentioned above, the tenth person said that although the information was not directly useful for her job, she has shared it with her office.

One interviewee had not provided information from the session to any clients (this was the advisor who did however share the information with her colleagues, who were using it). Six interviewees had used the information to help a small number of clients (up to 20), two had used it to help a larger number (30 in one case, 50 in the other), and one interviewee had included the information in articles for a housing association newsletter and in this way had reached an estimated 21,000 homes.

Interviewees were asked approximately what proportion of their total number of clients this composed. Answers ranged from less than 1%, through 10% (two people), 20% (1 person), 25% (1 person) to 50% (2 people). The remainder were not able to estimate<sup>8</sup>.

Five people had been using the information from Energy Best Deal consistently or fairly consistently since the session (this includes the advisor who did not use the information herself but had shared it with her colleagues). Two people said they were using the information less over time, while one person said she had been to similar sessions since, so the information had stayed fresh in her mind. One further person said that there is not much turnover in her client base (this is a housing association) so once the information was provided to the relevant people it was not used much more. The advisor who writes articles for a housing association newsletter said she includes articles on Energy Best Deal-related topics in each quarterly issue.

Seven advisors said they would benefit from refresher sessions on the same Energy Best Deal topics. A further one said that this would only be helpful if there was new, updated information to communicate. Two people said they would not want to attend refresher sessions.

Interviewees were asked if they would benefit from a session taking some of the subjects from the EBD session into more detail. Five people said yes, and listed the following topics:

- Case studies and demonstrations of practical use of the information
- Updates on changes to regulations
- More about consumer rights and energy supplier obligations
- Benefits, money management, and energy supplier social funds
- More about switching supplier and payment method, complaints procedures, trust funds and help with debt.

Six people said that colleagues who they had passed EBD information on to had used it with their clients; three did not know if their colleagues had used it, and one said all of her colleagues attended the session so she had not passed on information.

Interviewees were asked what the most common energy-related issues were that their clients had encountered over the course of the year since they attended the EBD presentation. These were:

- Rising fuel costs (mentioned by 4 interviewees)
- How to switch (2 people)
- The best way to heat the home efficiently and save energy (2 people)
- Debt issues (2 people)
- How to take meter readings (1 person)
- High cost of prepayment meters (1 person)

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<sup>8</sup> The interviewee who had written a newsletter for 21,000 homes has not been included because the tenants cannot be included as clients in the same way as for most frontline advice workers, as the relationship is much more distant.

When asked whether they had encountered any energy-related issues that were not covered in the presentation, six people said no.

Finally, interviewees were asked for any additional comments they would like to make. Comments were positive; 'really beneficial', 'excellent', 'well-run and informative', 'interesting and useful'. One person said that the session could have been improved by being more interactive, focusing more on practical applications rather than just being told facts, although this person emphasised that the facts were very useful. Another commented that advisors would benefit from updates where rules, regulations and resources change, and that these could be delivered either through another session or remotely (for example, an email newsletter). Another commented that she is now much more aware of her energy consumption and her electricity bills have reduced significantly since the session.

### **2010 frontline advice worker participant interviews: re-interviews**

Of the ten advisers whose answers are summarised in the previous section, five had been interviewed in the previous evaluation (for the 2010 EBD programme). These five were asked a set of questions based on their answers in the previous interview. When they were interviewed previously, three of these five had not looked into getting a better deal on their energy. Since then, two had visited switching websites, where one found that she would not save any money by switching, and the other decided to switch to a different tariff with the same supplier.

Two of the five had told us in the previous interview that they had looked into getting a better deal and had ended up switching. A year later, both think that they saved money by switching, although they have not measured this precisely, in one case because the interviewee moved house. One had checked and switched again since, although this was when she moved house, while the other had not checked prices again but was planning to do so soon.

### **2010 frontline advice worker participant interviews: not previously interviewed**

Of the five 2010 frontline advice workers who had not previously been interviewed, four had looked into getting a better deal following the session. Three had looked at switching websites (one of these had also bought an energy monitor), and one had contacted her energy supplier and looked into getting rid of her prepayment meter. Two people found it very easy to work out if they would save money by switching, while the other two found it fairly difficult. One of the people who found it difficult said that she did not have enough information about her consumption to work out if she would save money, and also that she had found out that it would cost her £100 to get rid of her prepayment meter.

Two people found it was not worth switching supplier while two found that it was worthwhile, and these two had switched.

The fifth advisor, who did not look into getting a better deal, said that this was because she was worried about something going wrong or switching to a worse deal. This was the same advisor who said that her older clients would be confused by the switching process.

## 2010 participant interviews – client case studies

In order to get a fuller picture of how frontline advice workers are using what they have learnt in the Energy Best Deal sessions over the long term, case studies were obtained from frontline advice workers who attended 2010 Energy Best Deal sessions. Ideally both the frontline advice workers and their clients would have been interviewed to obtain the case studies, to obtain two different perspectives, but frontline advice workers were unable to provide contact details for clients, either due to data protection or because they did not have them. Therefore these case studies are based on interviews with frontline advice workers only.

### Case Study 1

The frontline advice worker works for a social enterprise which gives advice to people who are thinking about returning to work. It also provides advice to social housing tenants.

The frontline advice worker first started working with the client when they had a general meeting to look at the client's money management. The frontline advice worker always looks at energy bills as part of this. The advisor used information about switching from the EBD session; this was something that she already knew about but the EBD session helped to embed the knowledge. The client was made aware of the fact that it was possible to switch to a cheaper tariff, which helped set his mind at rest because it provided a way to reduce one aspect of his expenditure. The energy aspect was an important part of the overall problem. The client plans to shop around for cheaper tariffs.

### Case Study 2

The frontline advice worker is a support worker at a housing association. The client approached her for help with issues regarding the condition of his property, which was in a bad state of repair. The client was in arrears with his energy supplier following a larger than expected quarterly bill. The advisor used information about savings from dual fuel tariffs and energy supplier trust funds, from the Energy Best Deal presentation. This was something that the advisor already knew about but that the EBD session had reinforced in her mind. She advised the client that a dual fuel tariff would be cheaper, and signposted him to the local debt advice centre to apply to energy supplier trusts to help with debt and with housing improvements, specifically carpeting as the property had very cold floors. The client was happy with the result: one trust fund paid off the debt while the other paid for carpet. The advisor has learnt from this case that energy supplier trust funds are not only useful for debt issues but also for domestic costs.

### Case Study 3

The frontline advice worker works at a Citizens Advice Bureau and her client had a large debt with his energy supplier due to high electricity bills.

The advisor asked the client to bring his latest bill and a recent meter reading to a meeting to see what the actual debt was. The client was asked about the household and property so a comparison could be made between the household and an average household's electricity use to assess whether his electricity use was above average.

The advisor used information from Energy Best Deal about trust funds and switching tariffs. This was something that the advisor did not know much about before attending the EBD session; normally she would have asked her supervisor, but having attended EBD she did not need to do this. The advisor used materials from EBD to talk the client through the processes of applying to a trust fund and switching.

The advisor made an application to the trust fund on the client's behalf. She assessed the client's electricity use and offered tips on how to reduce this. They also discussed switching as a way to reduce bills once the debt is reduced.

The outcome of the application to the trust fund is not yet known. The client has more awareness of his energy consumption and the advisor hopes that this will reduce future bills.

## **Conclusion**

In two of the case studies, energy bills were one part of a larger problem, and in both cases the advisor was already aware of ways to help with this, but the Energy Best Deal session reinforced this knowledge. In one case study, the client specifically approached the advisor for help with energy bills and the advisor would not have known how to help unless she had attended the Energy Best Deal session. Energy supplier trust funds featured in two case studies, and comments from other interviews with frontline advice workers have also shown that they have found the information about trust funds to be very useful.

## Energy Best Deal online

For 2011, a series of videos has been produced in order to disseminate the Energy Best Deal information more widely. The videos are aimed at the public and frontline advice workers and are available on several websites (see below). The tables below show viewing figures from 6<sup>th</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> August<sup>9</sup>. Table 2 shows the viewing figures for all videos according to the sites where they are located. Table 3 breaks down the YouTube viewing figures (last line of Table 2) by individual video.

**Table 2: Viewing figures by site**

Location of videos	Views
Ofgem and Citizens Advice website	5,647
Partner sites	708
Demo (for potential partners to view)	73
Ofgem Welsh website	57
Citizens Advice YouTube site	2,154
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,639</b>

**Table 3: YouTube viewing figures**

Videos on CAB YouTube site	Views
Struggling to Pay	824
Shopping Around	503
More Money in Your Pocket	251
Making a Complaint	162
Being Energy Efficient	132
Handling Salespeople	173
Avoiding Debt	109

The production of the Energy Best Deal videos is enabling the wider dissemination of the information provided by the EBD sessions, and it also provides a way for people who have attended the sessions to refresh their memories. The viewing figures for the first five months are encouraging and show that there is a demand for the information which they provide.

<sup>9</sup> The online videos were launched in April (English version) and August (Welsh version).

# Summary and conclusions

## Energy consumers: 2011 sessions

The majority of consumers who attended the sessions were worried about their energy bills; 43% said the bills were a worry but they were able to manage, while 29% said they were a financial strain. The remainder (27%) said bills were not a problem.

Prior to attending the session, 88% of consumers knew it was possible to switch supplier, and 37% had switched once in the past, with a further 19% having switched more than once. Two thirds (67%) of those who had switched had done so to get a better deal, while 33% had switched as a result of an approach from a energy supplier salesperson. Internet access was more common among the groups who had switched in the past than those who had not switched.

Ninety-seven percent of respondents said they found the EBD session useful, with information about how to switch energy supplier being the most useful thing. Eighty percent of people said they would definitely or probably do something as a result of the session. The most popular actions that people intended to take following the session were contacting their current energy supplier (50%), looking at other suppliers' prices (40%) and telling friends and family (38%). Intention to act following the session was not influenced by whether or not people had switched in the past, while intention to act did seem to be influenced by age, with those aged 70 or over more likely to say that they would not act.

Just under a third of consumers interviewed (29%, 23 people) had looked into getting a better deal following the session. Among this group, there was a higher proportion of internet access, compared to the group that did not look into getting a better deal.

The most popular action taken following the session was looking at a switching website (12 people), followed by contacting the existing supplier (8 people). Eighteen people found it 'very' or 'fairly' easy to work out if they would save money by switching, but four people said they found it fairly difficult. Ten people found that they would save money by switching supplier or tariff, and all of these had gone on to switch. Twelve people found they would not save money by switching and had not switched.

Although six interviewees had switched payment method, a common reason for not switching payment method was that prepayment meters were preferred for budgeting.

The 2011 Energy Best Deal sessions contained more information about energy efficiency than in previous years, and since the session thirty of the eighty consumers interviewed had taken a total of 48 actions to reduce their energy consumption. The majority of actions were no- or low-cost measures such as not leaving appliances on standby and using low-energy light bulbs, but three people had taken the big measures of installing loft or cavity wall insulation, and a further nine people intended to take these actions in the future.

Taking into account all of the actions that interviewees were asked about, 60% (48 people) had taken at least one action since the session. A further 11 people (14%) had told friends and family about what they had learnt at the session, even though they had not taken any action themselves.

Comments from interviewees showed that in general people found that the sessions gave them confidence in dealing with energy suppliers, so that even where they had not taken any action, they felt reassured that should they need to deal with any of the issues covered in the presentation, they would be better equipped to do so.

### **Consumers: 2010 sessions**

Of the eight people interviewed, one person who had not looked for a better deal when he was interviewed following the 2010 session had since looked at prices, but had found that he would not save much money. Two of the interviewees had previously looked into getting a better deal on their energy when they were interviewed in 2010, but had not switched. These two people had both checked prices again since the first interview; one had found that it would be worthwhile to switch, had done so and had found it easy, and the other found that it would not be worth switching.

The role of Energy Best Deal is to signpost consumers to sources of help, and so the fact that consumers took action to follow up on those sources of help is important even where they did not go on to switch supplier or tariff.

Overall, it appeared that if interviewees had not taken action fairly soon after the session they were unlikely to take action later, while those that had taken action after the session had continued to check prices, although this conclusion is based on a very small sample. Three interviewees gave positive feedback on the sessions, and it may be that where people don't take action they still have improved confidence from knowing their energy rights better.

One interviewee spoke very little English and was struggling with her bills. She found it almost impossible to access advice and help, or to speak to her supplier, due to the language barrier. This flags up an interesting issue for Energy Best Deal, because some sessions have been delivered in other languages where the capacity exists, but although this helps those consumers to understand their energy rights and what is possible, if they cannot speak English then it is hard for them to follow up on this. To tackle this, Energy Best Deal could provide contact details for sources of help in community languages, in particular energy suppliers' foreign language services where they exist. Relevant delivery partners could be required to research this and provide it in their sessions.

### **Frontline advice workers: 2011 sessions**

Just over a quarter (27%) of frontline advice workers who completed questionnaires were housing association employees, while a quarter (25%) were Citizens Advice Bureaux staff. Ninety-seven percent of frontline advice workers already knew that it was possible to change energy supplier, while 92% knew that some payment methods were more expensive than others.

Prior to the session, 59% had advised clients on energy-related topics. Twenty percent had not advised on any of the main Energy Best Deal topics. Following the session, 93% said they felt more confident advising on at least one of the topics covered in the presentation, and 29% felt more confident about all topics.

For each of the major topics covered in the presentation, the majority of those who had previously advised on each topic felt more confident about advising on it in the future. Of those who had not previously advised on each topic, a large majority felt more confident about advising on getting a better deal and switching payment method, with 48% feeling more confident about advising on

Warm Front or the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, and 23% and 27% feeling more confident advising on benefits & tax credits and debt respectively. The lower percentages for these last two may reflect the fact that these are complex topics that cannot be covered in much detail in the session and so people who have not previously advised on these topics may not feel they have learnt enough to give in-depth advice in this short session.

Of the 20 advisors interviewed after the session, 13 had given advice on the topics covered in the presentation. Nine advisors (45%) had given advice on topics they had not previously advised on. Across all 20 interviewees, information from Energy Best Deal had been passed on to an average of 8.7 clients per frontline advice worker in the average two months since the session.

Advisors flagged some issues that their clients have had that have stopped them getting a good deal on their energy. These include: no access to the internet or to a landline phone, no bank account, no access to the gas network, and vulnerability to mis-selling.

Several advisors who worked for housing associations were able to pass on information to a large number of clients and this may indicate an opportunity for Energy Best Deal to reach more people, by providing materials specifically designed for housing associations to use to communicate with their tenants.

### **Frontline advice workers: 2010 sessions**

An ongoing effect was much more evident for frontline advice workers than it was for consumers. Five interviewees had been using information from Energy Best Deal fairly consistently since the session. Seven people said they would benefit from refresher sessions on the same Energy Best Deal topics, and five said they would like to attend sessions which take some of the Energy Best Deal topics into more detail.

The enthusiasm amongst interviewees for refreshers and updates on Energy Best Deal topics suggests that some kind of remote communication could be useful for advisors who have attended sessions, such as a website which is updated when sources of information or regulations change, or a quarterly email newsletter which is sent out to advisors who have attended Energy Best Deal sessions.

# Appendix: Wales results

In this appendix the questionnaire results for Wales are separated out.

## Welsh consumer questionnaires

### Demographic information

A total of 161 consumer questionnaires were received for Welsh consumers, 14% of all consumer questionnaires. Basic demographic information collected showed the following:

- 68% were female and 32% were male.
- 36% were retired, 26% were unemployed, 19% were working, 17% were disabled or long-term sick, 1.3% were carers and 1.3% were students.
- 58% lived in rented accommodation: 20% in housing association properties, 21% in council housing, and 18% in private rented accommodation.
- 65% of respondents had internet access.
- 36% had switched supplier once in the past, while a further 16% had switched more than once.

Figure 23: Age of respondents

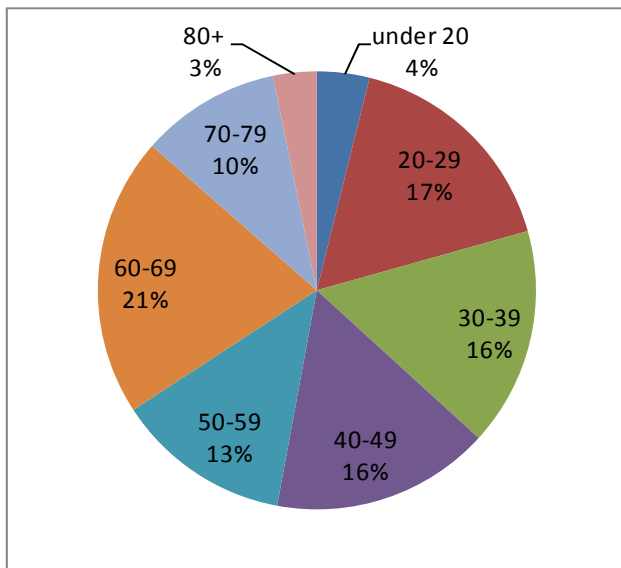
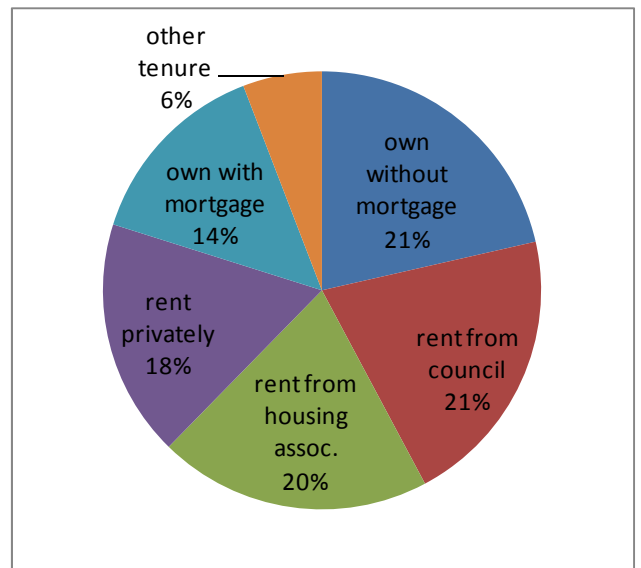


Figure 24: Tenure of respondents



## Payment types and attitudes to bills

Figure 25: Payment method (electricity, n=154)

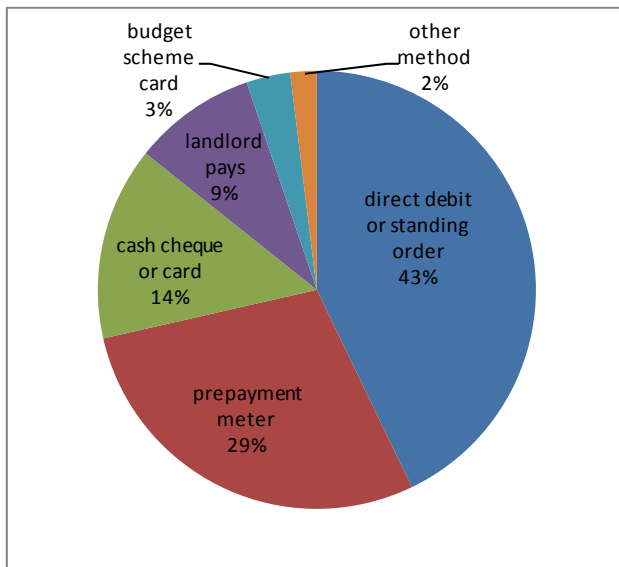
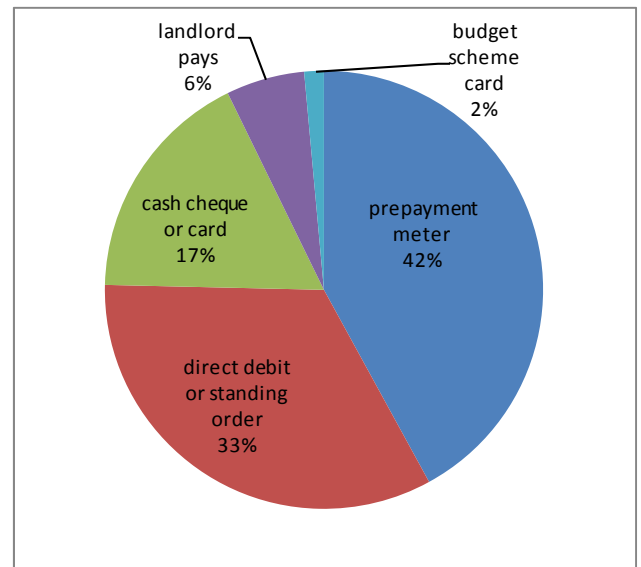


Figure 26: Payment method (gas, n=69)



Consumers were asked how they coped with their fuel bills in the winter. Figure 27 shows their responses; 42% said they found their winter fuel bills to be a strain, somewhat higher than the figure for England and Wales as a whole (29%).

Figure 27: Attitudes to winter fuel bills

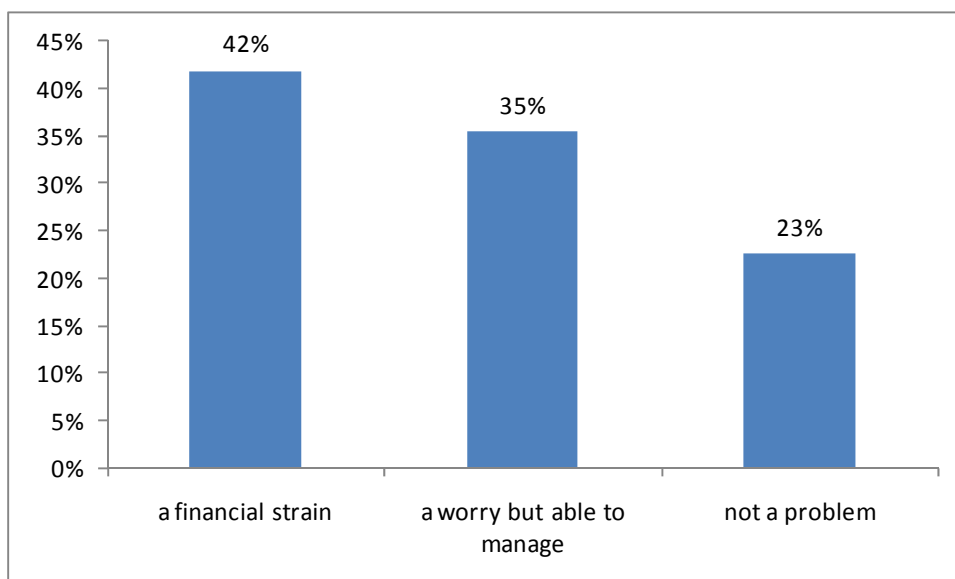
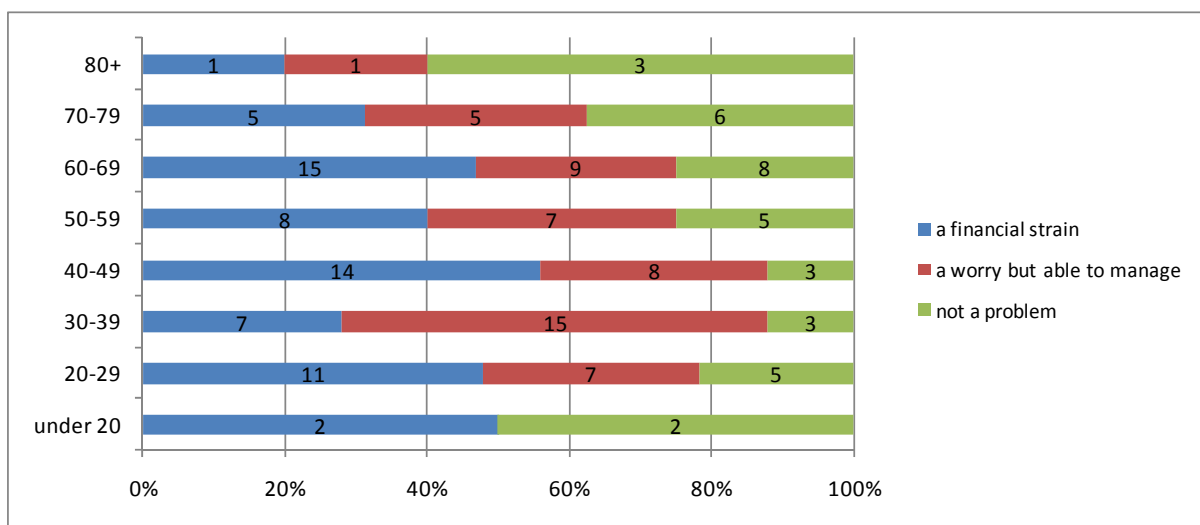


Figure 28 to Figure 30 break down attitude to winter bills by age, tenure and occupation. As the sample is small, numbers are shown rather than percentages. The results are shown only for people who answered the relevant questions. In terms of age, unlike the whole of England and Wales, there was little pattern between age and attitude to bills. In terms of tenure, the pattern was similar to the whole of England and Wales, in that those who rent privately were most likely to find their bills a

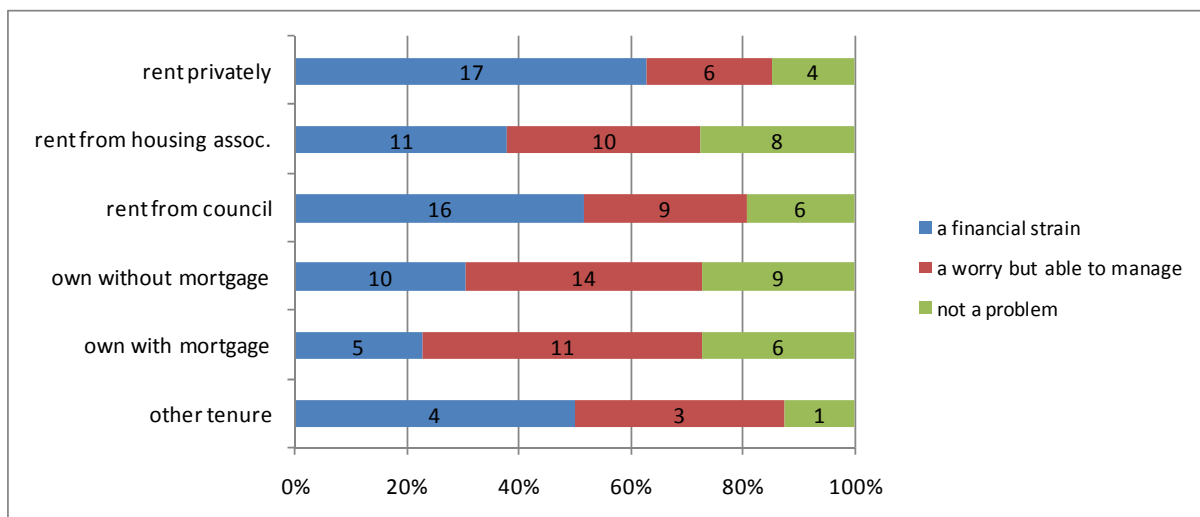
strain, followed by people who rent from the council. All groups in Wales were equally or more likely than the same groups in England and Wales to say that they found bills a strain.

In terms of occupation, those who were disabled or on long-term sick leave were most likely to find their fuel bills a strain, followed by those who were unemployed. Retired people were the group most likely to say that they did not find their bills to be a problem. These characteristics are the same as the whole of England and Wales, although in Wales a higher proportion of retired people and people on long term sick leave find their bills to be a financial strain, compared to the whole of England and Wales. The occupation groups of student and carer have been omitted from the graph below because only two people from each of these occupation groups answered the relevant questions.

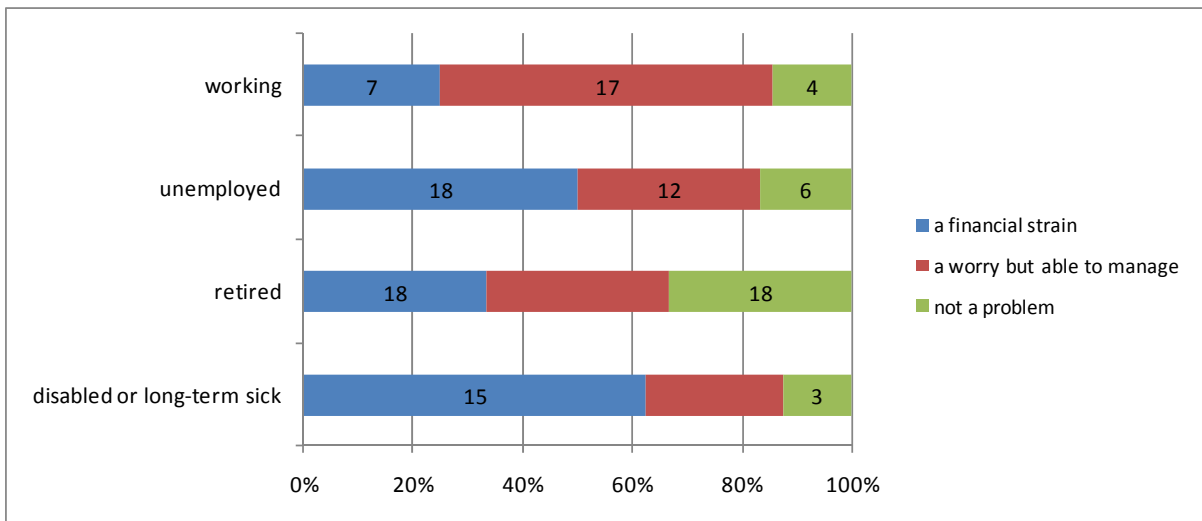
**Figure 28: Attitudes to winter bills by age**



**Figure 29: Attitudes to winter bills by tenure**



**Figure 30: Attitudes to winter bills by occupation**



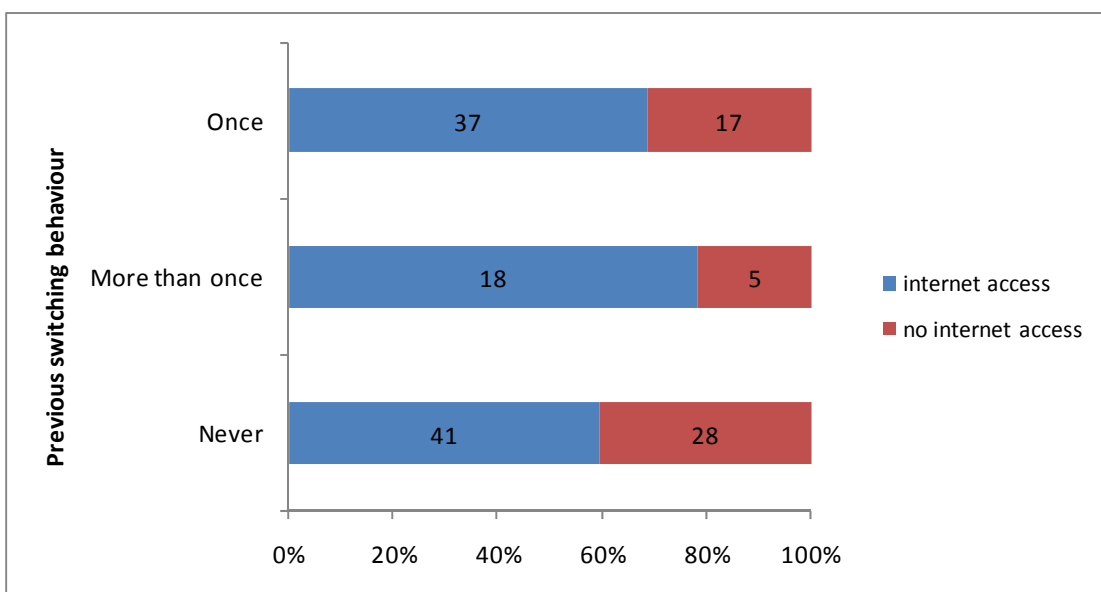
### Experience and knowledge of switching prior to the session

Eighty-eight percent of consumers already knew that it was possible to switch supplier, the same proportion for England and Wales as a whole. Thirty-six percent of respondents had already switched supplier once in the past, while a further 16% had switched more than once. Just over half of those who had switched in the past had switched to get a better deal (43 people, 52%), while the remainder of those who had switched had done so because they had been approached by an energy supplier salesperson.

Seventy percent of respondents (110 people) said they had never switched to a different tariff with the same supplier (15% answered 'don't know' to this question).

Figure 31 illustrates that switching was more likely with internet access.

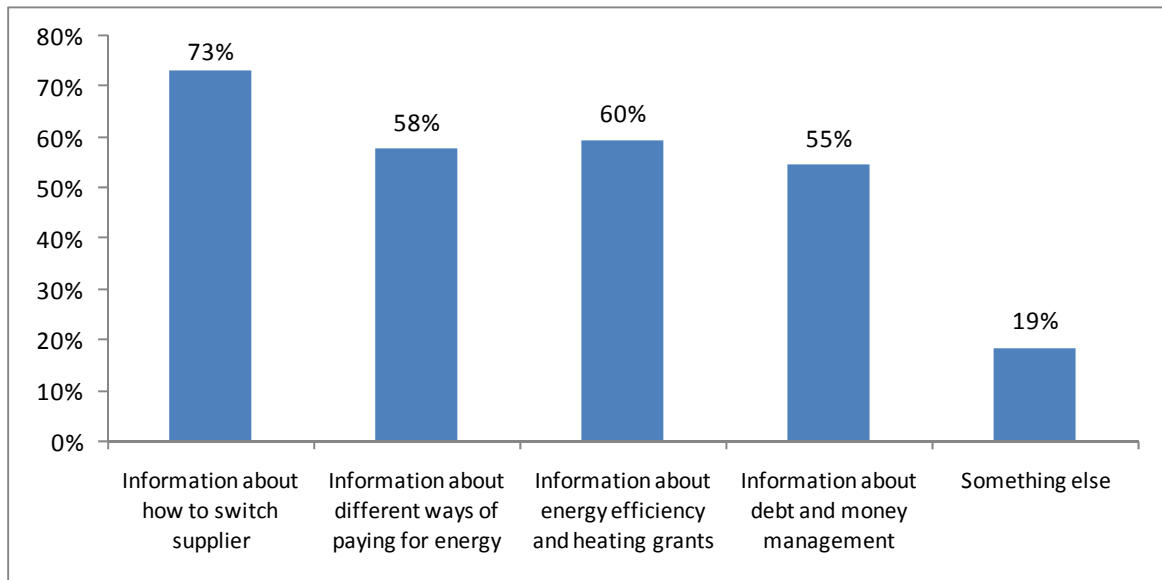
**Figure 31: Previous switching behaviour by internet access**



## The impact of the session

Ninety-nine percent of those who answered the question said they found the session useful. Figure 32 shows what people said they found useful about the session. Compared to England and Wales as a whole, people in Wales found all elements more useful; for most subjects, around 10% more, but for debt and money management, 16% more.

Figure 32: What did you find useful about the session?



## Follow-up actions

Eighty percent of people said they would definitely or probably do something as a result of the session. Figure 33 illustrates this. A higher proportion of Welsh consumers said they would definitely do something (49%), compared to the whole of England and Wales (38%).

Figure 33: Will you do anything as a result of the session today?

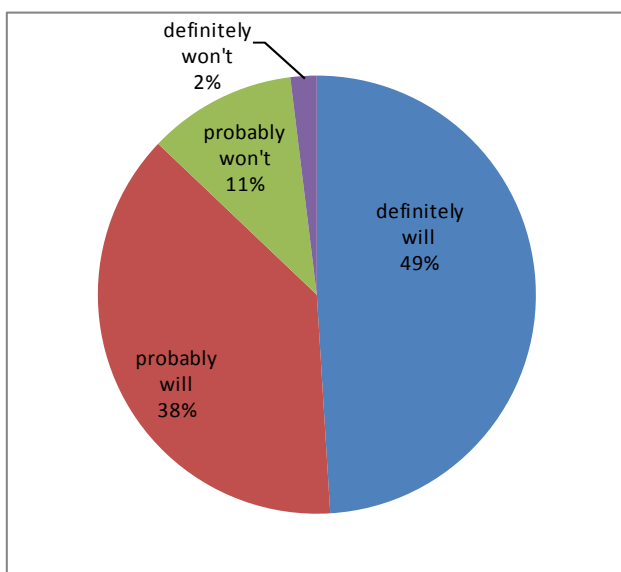
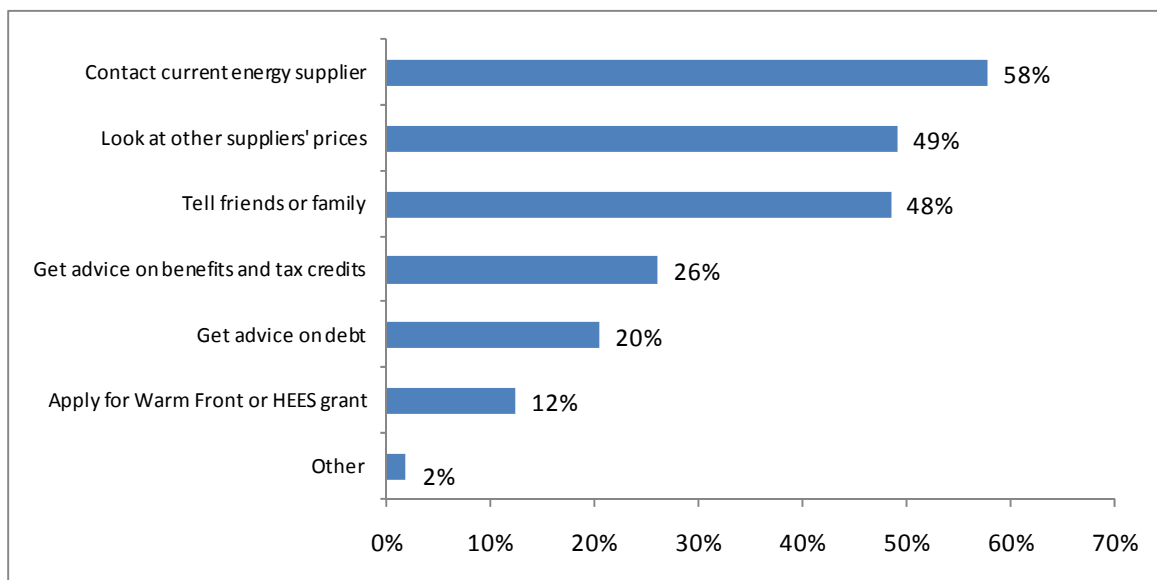


Figure 34 shows intended actions. The most popular intended action was contacting the current energy supplier, with half of respondents saying they would do this. The second most popular action was looking at other suppliers' prices, followed by telling friends and family. Other actions were less popular, possibly because unlike the aforementioned actions, they were only applicable to some consumers.

**Figure 34: Actions that consumers said they were likely to take following the session**



Other actions that people listed were: look into getting a social tariff; try to save water<sup>10</sup>; and warn people about loan sharks. Consumers in Wales said they were more likely to take all listed actions. The biggest difference was getting advice on benefits and tax credits, which 26% of respondents in Wales said they would do, compared to 13% in England and Wales.

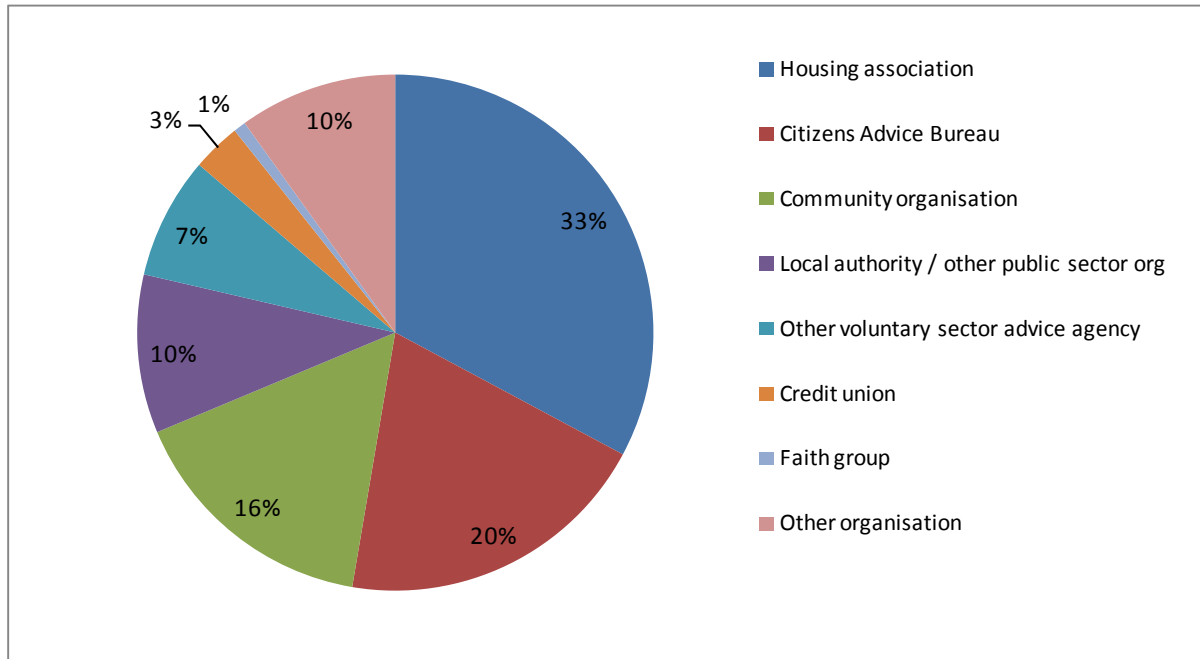
## Welsh frontline advice worker questionnaires

### Respondents and prior practice

Questionnaires were received from 133 frontline advice workers in Wales, 13% of all frontline advice worker questionnaires. Figure 35 shows the organisations represented by the frontline advice workers.

<sup>10</sup> As in the case of the whole of England and Wales, respondents did not specify whether they planned to save hot water to reduce their energy bills or to save water generally to reduce water bills. However, one person did say that they would apply for a social tariff for water, so in this case the session had made them think about saving on other utility bills as well.

**Figure 35: Welsh frontline advice worker organisation types**



The 'Other' category included representatives from Age UK, family centres, an advocacy service, and a support group for women.

Ninety-five percent already knew that it was possible to change energy supplier, and 95% also knew that some payment methods were more expensive than others.

Frontline advice workers were asked what types of advice they had given prior to the session:

- 46% had advised on getting a better deal on gas and electricity
- 44% had advised on changing payment method
- 35% had advised on applying for a Home Energy Efficiency Scheme grant
- 55% had advised on benefits and tax credits
- 43% had advised on debt

Most of these are very similar to the overall proportions for the whole of England and Wales, with a slightly lower percentage having previously given advice on benefits, tax credits and gas.

Sixty-five percent had experience of advising on specifically energy-related topics (the first three bullet points above). Eighteen percent had not advised on any of the topics above before.

### **The impact of the session**

When asked whether they felt better informed about switching energy supplier and payment method, 46% answered 'to a great extent' (lower than for the whole of England and Wales, which was 57%) and 51% answered 'to some extent'. Seventy-three percent said they were more likely to look for a better deal on their own energy following the session.

Frontline advice workers were asked if they felt more confident providing information on specific topics following the session (figures for England and Wales together are shown in brackets for comparison):

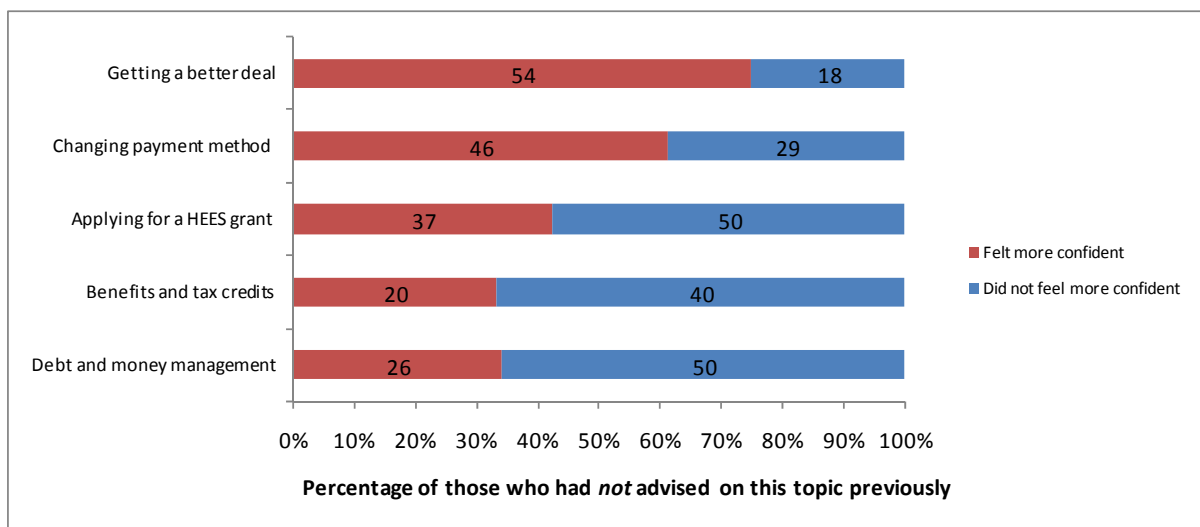
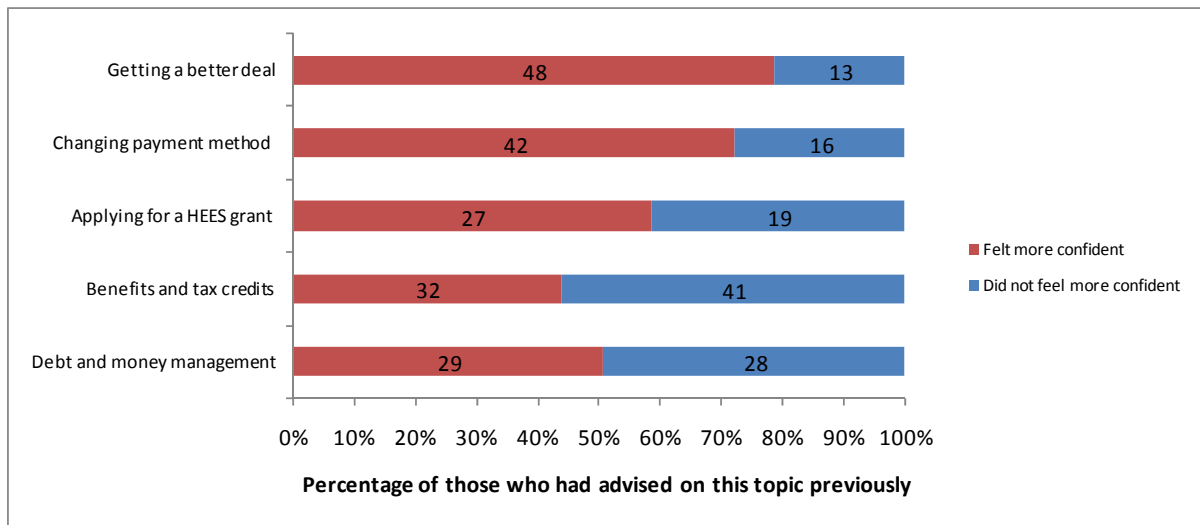
- 77% felt more confident advising on getting a better deal on gas and electricity (E&W 87%)
- 66% felt more confident advising on changing payment method (E&W 79%)
- 48% felt more confident advising on applying for a Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) grant (E&W 55%)
- 39% felt more confident advising on benefits and tax credits (E&W 41%)
- 41% felt more confident advising on debt (E&W 45%)

For the first two topics, these figures are somewhat lower than the equivalent results for England and Wales as a whole, while for the other topics they are very similar.

Eighty-seven percent said they felt more confident advising on at least one of these topics, while 21% felt more confident about all of these topics.

Figure 36 shows confidence in advising on topics following the session, split by whether or not the advisor had previously advised on each topic. Numbers rather than percentages are shown in the bars due to the small sample size. Of those who had advised on a topic previously, the majority had gained confidence from the presentation, and the proportion gaining confidence in Wales was higher than the whole of England and Wales. Although the increase in confidence was lower for the general financial topics than the energy-related topics, this difference was less marked than for the whole of England and Wales. Of those who had *not* advised on a topic previously, there was a similar, although more marked pattern to the whole of England and Wales; the increase in confidence was much lower for the general financial topics. In Wales the increase in confidence for the first three topics was higher than for the whole of England and Wales, while for the last two (general financial topics) the increase in confidence was lower than in the wider group.

**Figure 36: Increased confidence from advisors who had / had not advised on topics previously**



### Anticipated number of clients and colleagues to be informed

Frontline advice workers were asked how many clients they expected to advise on these topics over the course of the next six months. Answers totalled 1,688 clients, an average of just under 13 per advisor. This is lower than the figure for England and Wales as a whole (55), due to fewer advisors in Wales saying they would pass the information on to very large numbers of clients.

Frontline advice workers were also asked if they intended to pass on information to colleagues, and if so, how many. Sixty-six percent said they would definitely pass on information, while 27% said they probably would. The average estimated number of colleagues that information would be passed on to was three. This is half of the average for England and Wales as a whole, which was increased by some advisors having a large number of colleagues to whom they could pass on information.